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GUILFORD COURTHOUSE
NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

THE BATTLE
OF
GUILFORD COURTHOUSE

by

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OFFICE OF HISTORY AND HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE
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ABSTRACT

This study deals in some depth with the battle of Guilford Courthouse, fought on March 15, 1781, which proved in essence to be one of the really decisive engagements of the American Revolution. The focus is on the battle itself: how it came about and its general plan and execution with considerable attention to the detailed action of the fighting. There is intended emphasis on individual soldier commitment and performance in particular positions and locations, drawing heavily on personal accounts in both contemporary and recollection form. From this study have come the battle plans that are a part of the report.

The study points to several areas where, at least in part, there may be need for new or increased emphases:

1. The turning point in the battle came with the "flight" of the 2nd Maryland Regiment rather than with the crumbling of the first militia line.
2. The detailed analysis of casualty figures clearly shows that the two militia lines inflicted heavy losses on the seasoned British regulars.
3. Had Greene's communication with the units fighting in front of him been better the outcome could well have been different. He did not have sufficient information at times of decision.
4. The heroic and savage fighting of the 1st Maryland Regiment and Washington's cavalry with the British 2nd Battalion of Guards came too late in the day to be the decisive action. The American retreat had already begun.
5. More recent published accounts of the battle and sketch plans accompanying them have tended to become too complex and the descriptions faulty because of brevity and the repetition, sometimes compounded, of previous error.
6. The British victory was tantamount to defeat. Though it was left in possession of the field, Cornwallis's army was crippled as a fighting force. (See Appendices A and D).

FOREWORD

This study originated from the Guilford Courthouse National Military Park Historic Resource Study Proposal H-3. It called for "a study of troop positions, troop movements and appearance of the battleground during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse" in order that "these sites may be accurately designated and marked for visitor understanding and appreciation," and thereby "enable all Park interpretation to be upgraded." It is believed that the documented narrative (with its descriptions and conclusions) plus the battle plans that grew out of it will admit of a more thorough and surer handling of the story inherent in the park. It can, in some areas, best be used in close conjunction with the author's earlier report (in response to Resource Study Proposal GUCO H-4), "The First Guilford County Court House and Its Environs," dated December 15, 1970.

The writer is very grateful for the assistance given him by Superintendent Willard W. Danielson and Historian John Bryce when he was researching in the park last autumn. He is appreciative, too, for the work of many who have preceded him, but to no one more than Judge David Schenck and his compendium of data published in 1889 when the battlefield had not seen great change. The author's gratitude goes, too, to the tireless hand of Mrs. Frances H. McLawhorn of the staff of Colonial National Historical Park who supplied the typed draft of the report, and to Mrs. Beatrice B. Libys of the Office of History and Historic Architecture, who prepared the final manuscript for duplication. Thanks are in order, too, for Mr. Ricardo Torres-Reyes of the same office for a variety of necessary assistance in the "home office."

Charles E. Hatch, Jr.

July 27, 1971

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CHAPTER I

From Guilford Back to Guilford

It was on February 8, 1781, that Nathanael Greene with Daniel Morgan's detachment, which had distinguished itself at the Cowpens, moved into the area of Guilford Courthouse.¹ Just after Cowpens, leaving his main force under Isaac Huger, Greene had hastened to join the ailing Morgan, whom he reached on January 31st, to lead the retreat before the pursuing Cornwallis. Prior to his departure he had directed that the commissaries at Salisbury and Hillsboro be prepared to move back their prisoners and stores, to Virginia if necessary. With the race across the Catawba and Yadkin rivers won, Greene knew that it was essential to reunite the two parts of his army in the face of the determined pursuit of the fast-moving British army, which had stripped down for the purpose. It evolved that this juncture would take place at Guilford Courthouse.

Morgan, racked with sciatic pain and hemorrhoids, had been sent ahead in a carriage to supervise the arrangement of quarters and supplies in advance of his own and other units. He had reached the courthouse on the evening of March 5. It was on March 9 that Isaac Huger came in with the main army, which Henry ("Light Horse Harry") Lee and his Legion had already joined. Thus, for the moment, the principal American force in North Carolina was all one again, a situation that Cornwallis had wanted to prevent.²

The several days at Guilford admitted of some rest and refreshment for the exhausted American troops,³ especially those who had been a part

1. Guilford Courthouse (the village and structure) is discussed in some detail in Charles E. Hatch, Jr., Guilford Courthouse and Its Environs (National Park Service, Eastern Service Center, Office of History and Historic Architecture, December 15, 1970). See also George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin, Rebels and Redcoats (Cleveland and New York, c. 1957), pp. 434-35, and Edwin C. Bearss, The Battle of Cowpens: A Documented Narrative & Troop Movement Maps (National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, October 15, 1967).

2. James Graham, The Life of General Daniel Morgan...With Portions of His Correspondence Compiled from Authentic Sources (New York, 1856), pp. 352-53; Don Higginbotham, Daniel Morgan: Revolutionary Rifleman (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1961), pp. 150-54.

3. Green in a letter to George Washington on February 15 described the state of his men: "The miserable situation of the troops for want of

of Morgan's unit in its fast retreat after Cowpens. Greene and his staff, however, were busy about other things. For a time, evidently Greene had debated the possibility of a stand at Guilford at this juncture. To this end an appeal went out for surrounding militia units to join him. He had even gone so far as to have key supply items like ammunition, guns, flints, tools, and some clothing directed here from points of collection in North Carolina, even Virginia, though the principal assembly points for these and heavier stores were still across the Dan River.⁴ But it would be deemed inadvisable to stand and fight at this time.

The militia in the neighboring counties made a poor response and Greene found that he had no more than 200 with him. There was a council of war and the decision was that he was not yet strong enough to face the experienced enemy. There would be more retreat to and across the Dan River, some 70 miles away. Once again he divided his army, forming a body of 700 light troops to move northwestward toward the upper fords of the Dan while he moved northeastward to crossing points further down the river. This light troop command went to experienced Col. Ortho H. Williams, a highly successful replacement for Daniel Morgan, who was now so painfully

clothing has rendered the march the most painful imaginable, several hundreds of the soldiers marking the ground with their bloody feet." Nonetheless he could also report: "Our army is in good spirits, notwithstanding their sufferings and excessive fatigue." Quoted in William B. Willcox, The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1782 With an Appendix of Original Documents (New Haven, Conn., c. 1954), p. 489.

4. Theodore G. Thayer, Nathanael Greene: Strategist of the American Revolution (New York, 1960), pp. 315 ff.

Thayer gives a good, well-documented account of the field maneuvers following the retreat from and return to Guilford Courthouse (pp. 815-27).

5. This embraced 280 infantry under Lt. Col. John E. Howard, 240 dragoons under Lt. Cols. William Washington and Henry Lee, 60 Virginia riflemen, and Lee's infantry. At this time Greene had a total of some 2000 troops (Continents, riflemen, and cavalry)--the most by one report being "worn down and dispirited." This detachment would do an excellent service in the retreat; Greene wrote just after he had crossed into Virginia: "Colonel Williams, with the light infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Lee's Legion, and the cavalry of the First and Third Regiments, has covered our retreat which he has conducted with great propriety in the most

crippled that he could no longer remain with the army.⁶ As the army left Guilford, Morgan headed for home in Virginia on his "leave of absence" granted by Greene for recuperative purposes. Likely he had discussed the ground around Guilford Courthouse with Greene, who evidently evaluated it during his three-day stay in the area and found it favorable terrain should battle come here.

Race to Virginia

Greene left Guilford Courthouse on the run for the Dan on February 10, having but a 40-mile lead. Cornwallis would soon be in hot pursuit and it would be touch and go all the way. The British general did not prevent the union of Greene and Huger at Guilford⁷ and now he was intent on getting between Greene and Virginia where he knew there could be reinforcements and supplies for his opponent. Williams moved out first with his light troops and cavalry headed toward the upper fords of the Dan while Greene moved toward Irwin's and Boyd's ferries further down. Earlier he had sent Thaddeus Kosciuszko to this area to arrange boats and flats for a possible crossing. Greene hoped that Cornwallis would, at least in the beginning, not suspect his lower crossing. The lower crossing would keep Greene between Benedict Arnold and Cornwallis should Arnold move from Virginia toward the Earl. Besides, it was even nearer the more populated areas of the Old Dominion whence would come reinforcements and supplies. He was successful in misleading the British commander, as the latter frankly admitted:

I made great expedition, and got between him and the upper Fords, and being assured that the lower fords are seldom practicable in winter, and that he could not collect many Flats at any of the Ferries I was in great hopes, that he

critical situation. Cornwallis' movements are so rapid that few or no militia join us. He marches from twenty to thirty miles in a day, as he is organized to move with the same facility sic as a light infantry corps: Should he continue to push us, we must be finally ruined without reinforcements." (Greene to Steuben, February 15, 1781, in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 478.)

6. Morgan had written from Guilford Courthouse on February 6: "I am much indisposed with pains, and to add to my misfortunes, am violently attacked with the piles, so that I can scarcely sit upon my horse."

Quoted in Graham, Daniel Morgan, pp. 354-55.

7. As William Gordon noted: "His lordship being obliged to march his troops about 25 miles to the upper fords of the Yadkin, which are generally passable, gave time for the junction of the two divisions of the

would not escape me without receiving a blow. Nothing could exceed the patience and alacrity of the Officers, and Soldiers, under every species of hardship and fatigue, in endeavouring to overtake him; but our intelligence, upon this occasion, was exceedingly defective, which, with heavy rains, bad roads, and the passage of many deep Creeks, and bridges destroyed by the Enemy's light Troops, rendered all our exertions vain; for upon our arrival at Boyd's Ferry, on the 15th, we learned, that his rear guard had got over the night before, his Baggage and main body having passed, the preceding day, at that and a neighboring ferry.⁸

The Dan was now between the two armies, Cornwallis having been delayed by his faulty intelligence and Williams having later turned east and made the planned lower crossing. (Greene, at first, was not sure that Cornwallis would cease to follow at the river; had the Earl continued to pursue, he would have retreated farther.) Greene had saved his army and his stores and now Cornwallis was even farther from his stores and bases. As Theodore Thayer has concluded, the whole operation was highly successful. "Greene's retreat was masterful and few have ever been more productive of great consequences."⁹

At the Dan Cornwallis stopped, reviewed the situation and elected not to pursue. "My force being ill suited to enter by that quarter so powerful a Province as Virginia, and North Carolina being in the utmost confusion, after giving the Troops a halt of one day, I proceeded by easy marches to Hillsborough."¹⁰ He knew that his army was sorely tired, his

American army...near Guilford court-house, circumstances not having admitted of its being done either at Charlotte or Salisbury." The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America (New York, 1801-3rd American edition), 3, 165.

8. From a letter from Cornwallis to Lord George Germain, March 17, 1781, reproduced in B. F. Stevens (collector, compiler, and editor), The Campaigns in Virginia: An Exact Reprint of Six Rare Pamphlets on the Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy with very Numerous Important Unpublished Manuscript Notes by Sir Henry Clinton (London, 1888), 2, 359-60.

9. Nathanael Greene, p. 319.

10. Cornwallis to Germain, March 17, in Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 360.

provisions critically short, the country behind him unsecured, and his opponent's force still intact. Besides, Greene was holding most of the available boats and flats on the other side. Greene soon had the word that Cornwallis was busy collecting a ten-day supply of provisions and that he did not intend to follow him farther.

Greene now set up headquarters in Halifax Court House near the Dan.¹¹ His thought was on supply and reinforcement, with appeals going out for men and support to Governor Jefferson, to General Washington, to General Steuben and others--even to the state legislatures. Lieutenant-Colonel Washington was directed to impress horses for the dragoons as Greene believed it important to strengthen his cavalry. Word came that Generals John Butler, Robert Lawson, and others were successfully recruiting militia in North Carolina. Men, the report said, were also joining General Lillington, who had been detached by Greene while at Guilford Courthouse to Cross Creek to guard stores and obstruct the roads should Cornwallis move that way, or should Benedict Arnold shift to Wilmington and attempt to cooperate with Cornwallis from that direction. Surmising that the British army would proceed to Halifax, or Hillsboro, in North Carolina, Kosciuszko was sent to fortify as best he could the former, a center of a large farming area, hence a possible source of supplies.

Meanwhile the Virginia militia was gathering. Within several days General Stevens came in with some 800 and more were expected. Most of all Greene wanted riflemen from the western parts, men such as those who had distinguished themselves at Kings Mountain. Though the number proved less, it was said that a thousand under Charles Lynch, William Campbell, and others were on the way.

Cornwallis at Hillsboro began to take care of the business at hand. "I erected the King's Standard, and invited by Proclamation, all loyal Subjects to repair to it, and to stand forth, and take an active part, in assisting me to restore order, and Constitutional Government."¹² He could point to the fact that he had driven Greene out of North Carolina and this gave some encouragement to tory enlistments, which he greatly needed. At Hillsboro the British general began to have his troubles, however. His proclamation brought pledges of loyalty, but not that enthusiasm for enlistments that he hoped for and needed. He raised only seven companies.¹³ Besides, his depleted army did not find supplies in

11. Thayer, Nathanael Greene, pp. 319 ff.

12. Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 360.

13. John Marshall, The Life of George Washington (Philadelphia, 1805), 4, 358.

sufficient quantity. It took just a few days to consume the "quantity of salt beef, pork and some hogs found in the town." When wholesale searches and seizures of provisions and stock, even draft animals, multiplied, the populace cooled remarkably and his welcome waned. Consequently on February 25 he left Hillsboro and marched toward the Haw River on the road to Guilford.¹⁴

On February 23 Cornwallis detached Tarleton with his horse and a small body of infantry on a special mission. He wrote, "As a considerable body of Friends were said to reside between the Haw and Deep Rivers," he sent this force out "to prevent their being interrupted in assembling."¹⁵ He was to find recruitment in the settlements on the Haw essentially unsuccessful. Undoubtedly the bloody fate of Col. John Pyle's detachment of several hundred on February 25 was important in making matters even worse. It became known as "Pyle's Massacre."

Lee and Pickens, while scouting to find Tarleton, came upon a corps of perhaps 300 tories who, having assembled, were being led by Pyle to join Cornwallis. As Lee approached the party, two came by who mistook Lee's green-coated dragoons for Tarleton's men, who also wore green coats. Sensing the deception Lee was quick to play the game. With Tarleton's compliments he sent the men ahead and asked Pyle to draw his men along the side of the road to let his dragoons pass. This brought Lee's horsemen, sabers drawn, parallel with the tories. Then, as Lee was about to greet and talk with Pyle, some of the tories recognized Pickens' men coming up and unfortunately fired a round, or two, at them. Thereupon the dragoons laid it into the tories, sabers in hand, killing a full 90 of them and badly wounding most of the others, including Pyle himself, all with no American losses.¹⁶

14. "A British Orderly Book, 1780-1781," edited by A. R. Newsome, North Carolina Historical Review, 9 (1932), 376.

William Stedman who "had the honour of being commissary to the army under his lordship's command" frankly stated that a principal reason for the army's departure was his report on the "impossibility of supporting his majesty's army at Hillsborough." He complained that the Americans had swept the area clean. The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, (Dublin, 1794), 2, 372-73.

15. Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 360.

16. Lee gave a detailed account of this incident, regretting the slaughter that he had hoped to prevent by offering Pyle and his men an opportunity to recant. Once the firing took place, however, he considered it impossible to prevent what happened. Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States, edited with the revisions of 1827 retained and a biography of the author by Robert E. Lee (New York, 1870), pp. 256-59.

This proved a particularly strong discouragement for other responsive tory action,¹⁷ especially when considered with another incident that happened several days later. In the latter, a group of 70 or 80 loyalists who were moving at night from the Deep Creek section of Rowan County to join the British encountered Tarleton's Legion. When they failed to have the password and were not recognized, the dragoons proceeded to cut them up (killing four and wounding 20 or 30). Most escaped into the woods and the survivors made their way home with little inclination to reappear again.¹⁸

Back Across the Dan

The American commander knew that he had been forced out of North Carolina and that this would discourage the patriots and encourage the tories. There was growing pressure for him to quickly establish a presence south of the Dan. To this end Greene dispatched Brig. Gen. Andrew Pickens and his militia and Lt. Col. Henry Lee and his Legion over the river on February 18--"to rouse the drooping spirits of his friends, and to check the audacity of his foes." "Pickens and Lee were commanded to gain the

Cornwallis viewed it thus: "about two hundred of our Friends, under Colonel Pyle, on their way to Hillsborough, who mistaking the Rebels for Lieut Colonel Tarleton Corps, allowed themselves to be surrounded, and a number of them were most inhumanly butchered when begging for quarter, without making the least resistance." (Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, p. 360).

Sgt. Roger Lamb of the British 23rd Regiment gave his own personnel evaluation of the incident: "two or three hundred were inhumanly butchered"; "a specimen of republican mercy, as horrible as it is true." Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences During the Late American War, from Its Commencement to 1783 (Dublin, 1809), p. 347.

17. It is reported that Greene estimated "the over throw of colonel Pyle" as more effective than had the same "disconfiture" come to an "equal number of British troops." Charles Caldwell, Memoirs of the Life and Campaigns of the Hon. Nathaniel Greene (Philadelphia, 1819), p. 223.

18. There are various accounts of these incidents as in Robert O. DeMont, The Loyalists in North Carolina During the Revolution (Durham, N. C., 1940), pp. 135-56; Franklin and Mary Wickwire, Cornwallis: The American Adventure (Boston, 1970), pp. 448-49; Thayer, Nathanael Greene, pp. 322-23.

front of Cornwallis, to place themselves as close to him as safety would permit, in order to interrupt his communication with the country, to repress the meditated rising of the loyalists, and, at all events, to intercept any party of them which might attempt to join the enemy."¹⁹ On the 19th Pickens, who had moved as far as Guilford Courthouse, was urged to join Lee for joint disrupting tactics against the enemy and to trail the British into Hillsboro.²⁰

Williams and his light units were put across the Dan on the 20th. Greene himself followed with his main army, plus 600 or 700 Virginia militia grouped under Stevens, on the 24th. His first act was to ride ahead 18 miles to get firsthand information from Pickens and Lee. It was already clear that operations below the Dan were being effective as militia recruitment was reviving. Greene had already resolved that should he get militia in sufficient numbers he would offer Cornwallis the action he sought, a pitched battle. A goodly number would have to join him, but the word was encouraging.

Across the Dan, as Greene approached Hillsboro, the first of the mountain men joined him. There was Hugh Crockett with 160 and William Campbell with 100 more. Arthur Campbell came later but brought only 60 riflemen.²¹ These joined Ortho Williams, but as volunteers and not enlistees meaning that they retained freedom of choice to go and come as they decided. Despite this, however, the increasing forces (militia and riflemen) encouraged Greene. As February ended he grew more bold, though he remained cautious.

19. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 253; see also Henry Lee, The Campaign of 1781 in the Carolinas With Remarks Historical and Critical on Johnson's Life of Greene (Philadelphia, 1824-reissue of Chicago, 1962), pp. 127 ff.

Lee wrote: "on the 24th of February he [Greene] repassed the Dan, having been preceded by Pickens and Lee on the 18th, with their respective detachments. These officers were directed to observe the enemy, and repress the rising disaffections of the country." (Campaigns of 1781, p. 127.)

20. This is succinctly covered in Marshall, Life of Washington, 4, 359.

21. Thayer, Nathanael Greene, p. 323 ff.

22. Richard Alden, The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789, volume III in A History of the South Series (Baton Rouge, La.), 1957, pp. 256 ff; Marshall, The Life of Washington, 4, 326 ff.

The British had marched from Hillsboro toward the Haw on February 25, Cornwallis having recalled Tarleton's detachment to scout the way. Then Cornwallis "judged it expedient to cross the Haw and he came to be encamped near Allamance Creek" throwing out a detachment "a few miles from me on the road to Deep River, more effective to cover the Country." From his camp he had access to the roads leading in various directions-- to Salisbury, Guilford, High Rock Ford, or Hillsboro. Control, ready use, of the roads was militarily important.²³

23. Stevens, Clinton Cornwallis-Controversy, 2, 361; Newsome, "British Orderly Book," N. C. Hist. Rev., 9, 374 ff. Also see Francis Vinton Greene, General Greene, in the Great Commander Series (New York, 1897), pp. 210-12; Piers Macksey, The War for America, 1775-1783 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), pp. 405-06.

CHAPTER II

Maneuver for Battle

Greene followed Cornwallis westward and across the Haw on February 26, camping at High Rock Ford where the road to Guilford Courthouse crossed Troublesome Creek. In the meanwhile, as already noted, Cornwallis had crossed the Haw and was some 20 miles south on Alamance Creek. The next day Greene caught up with Williams, Lee, and Pickens and moved to within 15 miles of the enemy in the area between Troublesome and Reedy Fork Creeks.¹ He then pushed out his light detachment between himself and the enemy.

Greene, especially with his light troops, now began to harass the British. He attacked enemy detachments, interrupted Cornwallis's communications, forced tories to cover, and curtailed British foraging activities. On March 1 Williams, with his horse and light infantry, moved to within three miles of the British commander. Actually he was on the old Alamance battleground of the Regulators. Alamance Creek, however, separated the two forces. Greene knew he had superiority in cavalry with Lee's and Washington's dragoons and believed the risks were reasonably safe for his mobile detachment. On March 2 Lee's horse was successful once again against the Tarleton cavalry. Coming upon them they made a strong attack that felled a score or more of the enemy while taking only a half-dozen casualties. Greene reported it thus: "On the 2d Lieutenant-colonel Lee, with a detachment of riflemen, attacked the advance of the British army, under Colonel Tarleton near Allamance, and killed and wounded, by report, about thirty of them."² By British account, however, drawn in large measure from the Cornwallis and Tarleton descriptions, it was the Americans who had been bested in the brief encounter.³

1. Henry Lee Wrote: "Proceeding thus, he advanced to the heights between Reedy Fork and Troublesome Creek, having his headquarters at the Speedwell iron works on the latter, and Boyd's mill on the former stream." (Campaigns of 1781, p. 134.)

2. Greene to Washington, on March 10, from "head quarters, iron works," given in Banastre Tarleton, A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of North America (Dublin, 1787), pp. 264-65.

3. "Tarleton had not advanced far when he fell in with a considerable corps of the enemy, whom he instantly attacked, and soon routed; but being ignorant of their force, how they were supported, and grown circumspect from experience, he with great prudence restrained his ardour, and desisted from the pursuit. He soon learned from the prisoners, that those he had defeated were the corps called Lee's legion, with three or four

Now Cornwallis began to feel the pinch rather sharply as his enemy grew stronger and more forceful. Tarleton commented: "The British troops, since their departure from Hillborough had been in great want of many of those necessaries, which in general, are deemed absolutely requisite to render their hardship supportable, and their minds contented; this deficiency, however, did not diffuse dissatisfaction, or produce desertion, but rather augmented the zeal, and strengthened the fidelity of the soldiery."⁴

In this period both armies suffered heavily from hunger, cold, wet and fatigue. In regard to food Sergeant Lamb of the British graphically recorded: "Sometimes we had turnips served out for food, when we came to a turnip field; or arriving at a field of corn, we converted our canteens into rasps and ground our Indian corn for bread; when we would get no Indian corn, we were compelled to eat liver as a substitute for bread, with our lean beef."⁵

Nor did the armies get far apart in this period. British Brig. Gen. Charles O'Hara wrote: "From that time of arrival at Alamance to the 15th of March, the two armies were never above twenty miles asunder, they constantly avoiding a general action and we as industriously seeking it. These operations obligated the armies to make numberless moves which it is impossible to detail."⁶

Greene too was having his troubles. Until his reinforcements were on hand, he was not strong enough to meet the enemy in open fight. Food was no longer abundant in the countryside, which was being picked bare by both armies. Already rations were short, as was forage for horses, of which there were now too many. As the militia came in many arrived on their own mounts expecting to keep their mobility. When Greene had a thousand head sent away, reaction was manifested by an increased desertion rate.⁷

hundred Back Mountain men, and some militia, under a Colonel Preston. He likewise discovered through the same intelligence that Greene, with a part of his army was not far away." The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, for the Year 1781 (London, 1782), p. 64.

4. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 276.

5. Lamb, Occurrences During the Late American War, p. 381.

6. Quoted in Wickwires, Cornwallis, p. 289.

7. Wickwires, Cornwallis, pp. 389 ff; Thayer, Nathanael Greene, pp. 326 ff.

Cornwallis, though frustrated at seeing his enemy grow stronger without being able to bring him to battle, was far from impotent, as Greene knew. On March 6, having word that the Americans "were posted carelessly at separate Plantations, for the convenience of subsisting" he resolved to attempt a blow. Early in the morning under cover of a dense fog he crossed Alamance Creek and headed briskly toward Reedy Fork at Wetzell's (Whitesell's) Mill, where there was an established crossing. He hoped either to bring on a general action, or at least to cut off the Williams detachment just a few miles in his front. Greene, however, did not yet want to engage. It was not his plan to move to William's support, rather Williams received orders to withdraw rather than commit his whole detachment. Cornwallis, Greene was sure, would want nothing better than to defeat him in pieces.

Williams, though pressed by Lt. Col. James Webster who led the British vanguard, after a stand made the crossing in time and moved away from the creek. At the crossing he posted a body of militia riflemen under Cols. William Preston and William Campbell and cavalry under Lee to confront Webster. In the British crossing there was a heavy skirmish, a smart action,⁸ during most of the afternoon with resulting casualties to both forces.⁹

Greene wrote to Thomas Jefferson several days later that it was his surmise that Cornwallis had sought to intercept stores moving in that direction, or to "cut off our Light Infantry from the main body of the Army then advanced upwards of seven Miles. If it is either, they were disappointed; and they being sensible of it have changed their directions, and have retired toward Guilford Court House."¹⁰

8. Lee (Memoirs of the War, pp. 265 ff.) penned a detailed account of the action. See also Stedman, The American War, 2, 373 ff., and Gordon, Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 172-73.

9. William Gordon placed the "loss of the Americans...[at] about 50 killed and wounded, and that of the British probably much greater, as they twice sustained the unexpected fire of the former." Greene reported the losses thus: "the Enemy suffered considerably tho' our loss was very trifling." A soldier among the Delaware troops gave this terse version of the affair: "a smart skirmish, in which a great number of Tories were sent to the lower region." William Seymour, "A Journal of the Southern Expedition 1780-1783," Historical and Biographical Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware (Paper XV [1899]), 2, 19.

10. A letter written at High Rock Ford on March 10 in The Papers of Thomas Jefferson edited by Julian P. Boyd (Princeton, N. J., 1952), 5, 111-13.

Greene was grateful that the British had been "handsomely opposed, and suffered considerably" at Wetzell's Mill. It gave him more time in which to draw back. "This maneuver occasioned me to retire over the Haw river, and move down the north side of it, with a view to secure our stores coming to the army, and to form a junction with several considerable reinforcements."¹¹ Cornwallis, seeing that it was futile to pursue, on the 7th began his return to the general area of his previous encampment, all the while sweeping the countryside for provisions and support.¹²

North of the Haw Greene anxiously, almost nervously, awaited his approaching reinforcements. Some coming from Virginia had detoured to Hillsboro with word (rumor it was) that Cornwallis had turned toward Wilmington; however, Greene rerouted them westward and waited. To confuse the enemy he moved camp every night,¹³ marching and countermarching. He was cautious and he knew it. He knew the importance of battle and victory; he also knew the effects that could flow from a disastrous defeat and the loss of an army. This in essence was his word to Jefferson on March 10:

It is of note that during his marches and maneuvers, then and previously, Cornwallis too seemingly passed through Guilford Courthouse, at least on several occasions, and knew the area in some degree. He of course did not know that Greene hoped, if conditions were right, to make it their battlefield. Consequently he likely had not evaluated it so carefully as had Greene.

11. Greene to Washington, March 10 (Tarleton, Campaigns in 1780 and 1781, p. 265).

12. Reports of depredations especially against the "disloyal" inhabitants continued. It was presumably in this period, on February 11, that the premises of Dr. David Caldwell were ransacked. "Before leaving the place, the library and papers of Dr. Caldwell were deliberately destroyed by fire." Caldwell, a patriot and leader of his Buffalo congregation in the area that embraced Guilford Courthouse, is said to have been in Greene's camp at the time. William Henry Foote, Sketches of North Carolina, Historical and Biographical (New York, 1846-3rd Edition, 1965), pp. 239, 274.

Foote continued: "After remaining two days, the British army left the neighborhood a scene of desolation and distress, and removed to the Quaker settlement on Deep River. About this time occurred the massacre of the bugler of Lee's Legion while he was crying for quarter, but a little more atrocious than the slaughters and plunderings which were enacted throughout Dr. Caldwell's congregations."

13. As William Gordon put it: "While Greene was really unequal to even defensive operations, and waited to have his army strengthened, he

I have been obliged to practice that by finesse
which I dared not attempt by force. I know the
People have been in anxious suspense waiting the
event of a general action, but let the consequences
of censure what it may, nothing shall hurry me
into a measure that is not suggested by prudence or
connects with it the interest of the southern
department.¹⁴

But the time was at hand and in several letters from High Rock Ford
on March 10 Greene told of troop arrivals. He wrote to Jefferson of his
recent "junction with several considerable reinforcements of Carolina
and Virginia militia, and one regiment of eighteen-months men, on the
March from Hillsborough to High Rock."¹⁵

Henry Lee, somewhat jubilantly, describes this arrival of new units
and reinforcements:¹⁶

In a few days the new levies under Colonel John Green,
and the militia from Virginia under
Brigadier-General [Robert] Lawson, with a part
of the supplies and stores so much wanted,
reached camp. The levies were distributed in
the regiments of Virginia, commanded by Colonel
Green and Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Hawes.

lay for seven days within ten miles of Cornwallis' Camp; but he took a
new position every night, and kept it a profound secret with himself where
the next was to be. (Establishment of the Independence of the United
States, pp. 172-73.)

14. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 111-13.

15. Greene to Jefferson, March 10 (Tarleton, The Campaigns of 1780
and 1781, pp. 264-65).

He confided here, too, some of his previous concern: "Our militia
had been upon such a loose and uncertain footing ever since we crossed
the Dan, that I could attempt nothing with confidence, though we kept
within ten or twelve miles of the enemy for several days. The enemy kept
close, seemingly determined that we should gain no advantage of them
without risking something of consequence."

16. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 269.

The militia being united to those collected by [Edward] Stevens while at Halifax Court-House, were divided into two brigades, under the direction of that general and Brigadier Lawson, who, like Stevens, had commanded a Continental regiment and with many other brave and active officers, had been left without troops by the compression of our regular corps; yet being unwilling to abandon the service of their country, still in jeopardy, they both had offered to take command of the militia.

Soon afterwards came in the North Carolina force, led by the Brigadiers John Butler and Thomas Eaton. Previously Colonels William Campbell and William Preston¹⁷ and Charles Lynch had joined, whose united corps did not exceed six hundred rank and file. Our force now was estimated at four thousand five hundred, horse, foot and artillery; of which, the Continental portion did not amount to quite one thousand six hundred. To acquaint himself with the character of his late accession of troops, and to make ready the many requisite preparations for service, the general continued in his position at the iron-works, having drawn in most of his light corps.

Theodore Thayer has summarized the new troops as:¹⁸ (1) a thousand Virginia militia under Robert Lawson, bringing the Virginia militia strength under Stevens to 1,700; (2) a thousand North Carolina militia under John

17. Campbell and Preston had been with the light troops for some days replacing the corps of Brigadier Pickens, who had been released to return home. Lee also reports that Preston of Montgomery County, Virginia, had "arrived at the head of three hundred hardy mountaineers" about the time of the "Pyle Massacre" and had fallen in with the dragoons. (*Ibid.*, pp. 260, 269n.)

18. Nathanael Greene, pp. 326-27.

Thayer concluded that there were now in Greene's army some 4,200, through less than half of them seasoned veterans, and in Cornwallis' force but 2,000 though these were all experienced veterans. For a further itemization of the forces see Appendix B.

Butler and Thomas Eaton; (3) some 530 Continentals (a regiment of eighteen-months men--"Virginia Regulars") whom Steuben had recruited were brought in by Richard Campbell¹⁹ and added to Huger's division; (4) additional riflemen from the western parts, some under Charles Lynch, bringing this contingent to 400.

The die was all but cast. Now Greene would push for action, hopefully it seems, in the area around and just west of Guilford Courthouse along the main road that led from Salisbury to Hillsboro. On March 10 Greene dissolved his light corps under Williams and reconstituted his units into a striking force. This busied him for the next day or two, and headquarters evidently remained more or less fixed in this interim at High Rock Ford.²⁰ As Charles Caldwell observed, "It was to the unspeakable joy of Greene, when arrived his expected reinforcements, with provisions and military stores. Having spent a few days, in the further discipline and amalgamation of his army, by the intermingling of fresh with veteran soldiers, it was now determined by him, no longer to decline a meeting with the enemy, but to seek battle, if it should be offered."²¹

The word of impending battle was also rumored strongly in the country-side. It was recorded in the Moravian diary for the congregation of Salem on March 11 that the armies were drawing close together: "As the British army is drawing nearer to us again not so many people are passing, but those that do come are troublesome. It is said that headquarters of the Continental army is at High Rock ford on Haw river, and that the British are six miles from Guilford Court-House."²²

The army having cooked and eaten breakfast, about six o'clock in the morning on the 14th, Greene put his troops in motion for Guilford Courthouse. St. George Tucker, with Lawson's Virginia militia brigade, wrote home to his wife that morning from "Camp Highrock Ford": "My dearest Fanny, We join Gen. Greene last night, and are this moment

19. The Campbells are difficult to differentiate in the actions. There were three of them (Richard, Arthur, and William) and all were addressed as "Colonel." It is clear that William Campbell was the same who had won fame at King's Mountain. (Thayer, Nathanael Greene, pp. 326-27, noting letters from Greene to Jefferson [March 10], Greene to Morgan [March 20], and Campbell to Greene [March 8].)

20. See Gordon, Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 171-73; George Washington Greene, The Life of Nathanael Greene (New York, 1867-71), 3, 189-92; Henry B. Dawson, Battles of the United States by Land and Sea (New York, 1858), 1, 663.

21. Memoirs of Life of Greene, p. 224.

22. Adelaide L. Fries (translator and editor), Records of the Moravians in North Carolina (Raleigh, N. C., 1930), 4, 1686.

marching to attack Cornwallis with a force which I am in hopes is full able to cope with him."²³ William Seymour with the Delaware unit noted, too, that "On the 14th we encamped near Guilford Court House."²⁴ Greene himself reported: "On the 14th we marched to Guilford Court House and took a position within 8 Miles of the Enemies encampment, with a view to attack them the next Morning, but they anticipated our designs and moved down upon us. We were in perfect readiness to receive them."²⁵

He reached Guilford in the afternoon with time once again to study the terrain and ponder the situation. Likely he was concerned with two possibilities--rain and a night attack. Either situation would put him at a decided disadvantage. In the case of heavy rain the bayonet, with musket and rifle locks wet, could become the principal weapon of the day. Militia and untried soldiers feared this weapon. It was well established, too, that militia eschewed night fighting when at all possible.²⁶ Greene would be fortunate on both counts.

There was on March 11 also word of peaceful community involvement in the fighting that had been going on: "This afternoon the Colonels Preston and Crocket returned, and the former found that the baggage he had thought lost had followed him here. Having spent several hours in looking after their wounded men, and having commended them to our best care, they went to their homes."

23. "The Southern Campaign: 1781: From Guilford Court House to the Siege of York: Narrated in the Letters from Judge St. George Tucker to His Wife," The Magazine of American History With Notes and Queries, 7 (1881), 39.

24. "A Journal of the Southern Expedition," Papers of Hist. Soc. of Delaware, 2 (Paper XV), 19-20.

Seymour continued, almost as if relieved: "after a march of about one hundred and ninety miles in about seven days time, nor have we been all this time more than ten or twelve miles from said Court House."

25. Greene to Jefferson, March 16, from "Camp at the Iron Works, 10 Miles from Guilford Court House" (Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 156-57).

26. Thayer, Nathanael Greene, p. 327; Wickwires, Cornwallis, p. 292.

The time had come for battle of each of the commanding generals. Both now wanted it and as Greene wrote Washington, "when both parties are agreed in a matter all obstacles are soon removed."²⁷ Without a decided victory, Cornwallis could neither win nor hold North Carolina. It was necessary for Greene, too, to demonstrate that he could hold and control the country. On the eve of the engagement Cornwallis "was determined to fight the Rebel Army, if it approached me, being convinced, that it would be impossible to succeed in that great object of our arduous Campaign, the calling forth the numerous loyalists of North Carolina, whilst a doubt remained on their minds of the superiority of our Arms."²⁸ Banastre Tarleton in retrospect was of the view: "A defeat of the British would have been attended with the total destruction of Earl Cornwallis' infantry, whilst a victory at this juncture could produce no very decisive consequences against the Americans."²⁹ As for Greene, strengthened with reinforcements, he "was persuaded, that if we were successful, it would prove ruinous to the enemy, and, if otherwise, it would only prove a partial evil to us."³⁰

Cornwallis had word of Greene's movement to Guilford on the 14th, the day that the Americans arrived, but it was not until in the evening that he received full confirmation of it. He in the meanwhile "had moved to the Quaker Meeting House area in the fork of Deep River on the 13th."³¹

27. Quoted in F. V. Greene, General Greene, p. 16.

Nathanael Greene later wrote Morgan on March 20: "Since we crossed the Dan, we have made many manoeuvres and had much skirmishing. I have not time to give you the particulars. Until the 11th, our force was inferior to the enemy's, which obliged us to act cautiously. But forming a junction with a body of North Carolina and Virginia militia, and Col. Campbell coming up with a detachment of eighteen-months men from Virginia, I determined to give the enemy battle." (Quoted in Graham, Daniel Morgan, p. 372.)

28. Cornwallis to Germain, letter of March 17 (Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 362).

29. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 284-85, 322.

30. In his letter of March 16 to Samuel Huntington (Tarleton, Campaign of 1780 and 1781, p. 322).

31. Letter to Germain (Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 362).

CHAPTER III

The Preliminary Encounter: A "Severe Skirmish"

As Cornwallis noted: "I had encamped, on the 13th instant, at the Quaker's meeting house and settlement between the forks of Deep river. On the 14th I received...information of Greene's reinforcements¹ and word that he was marching to attack the British troops. During the afternoon intelligence was brought, which was confirmed in the night, that he had advanced that day to Guildford, about twelve miles from our camp. Being now persuaded that he had resolved to hazard an engagement, after detailing Lieutenant-Colonel Hamilton with our waggons, and baggage, escorted by his own Loyalist regiment, a detachment of one hundred infantry, and twenty cavalry, towards Bell's mill on Deep river,² I marched with the rest of the corps at daybreak without delaying to eat breakfast on the morning of the 15th to meet the enemy, or attack them in their encampment."³

The order of march was described by Tarleton: "The cavalry, the light infantry of the guards, and the yagers, composed the advanced guard. Colonel Webster's brigade the regiment of Bose, and the brigade of guards, followed successively: The artillery marched with their respective divisions. The British had proceeded seven miles on the great Salisbury

1. Cornwallis's information was that "General Butler, with a body of North-Carolina militia and the expected reinforcements from Virginia, said to consist of a Virginia state regiment, a corps of Virginia eighteen months men, three thousand Virginia militia and recruits from the Maryland line, had joined General Greene." The report was that the American army now numbered "nine or ten thousand men." Evidently Cornwallis discounted this figure as later in the same report he mentioned the figure of 7,000. Also, it was on the same day, March 17, he wrote this to Germain that he also wrote to Lord Rawdon from his "Camp at Guildford" that Greene had "advanced with his Army of about 5, or 6,000 men, & four six-pounders to this place." Letter to Germain (in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 311-12); transcript of the original letter to Rawdon (in the William L. Clements Library) in files of Guilford Courthouse NMP.

2. It was reported that this was "a stronger escort than he could well spare." Bell's Mill "was considerably lower down on the Deep River, in the heart of the well-affected country." (Annual Register for 1781, p. 65.)

3. Cornwallis to Germain (in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 311-12).

road to Guilford when the light troops drove in a picket of the enemy."⁴ The picket was one that had been pushed out by Henry Lee.

Lee, his Legion horse and infantry and the riflemen under William Campbell with him, had rejoined Greene according to plan on the morning of March 14 after an unfruitful and frustrating previous night.⁵ As was

Stedman (The American War, 2, 384-85) relates that "They had no provisions of any kind whatever on that day, not until between three and four in the afternoon on the succeeding day, and then but a scanty allowance, not exceeding one quarter of a pound of flour, and the same quantity of very lean beef."

4. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 277-79.

The official "General After Orders" for the march, dated March 14, read: "The army to be under arms & the bat Horses Loaded ready to march precisely At half past five O'clock tomorrow Morning in two Columns in the following Order."

<u>Left Column</u>	<u>Right Column</u>
Jagers	Advance Guard An Officer & 12 Dragoons
Lt. Infantry Guards	Commanded by Lt. Col. Hamilton's Regt.
Guards	} Lt. C. Tarleton
Cavalry	Detachment for Detail
Lt. Col. Websters Brigade	(2 Capts., 3 Sub Alters, 100 men)
Regt. De Bose	Brigade of Guards 5 + 35
Brigade of Guards	Lt. Col. Webster Reg. 9 + 45
	Regt. De Bose 3 + 20
Guns as Usual	17 + 100
("A British Orderly Book", <u>N. C. Hist. Rev.</u> , 9, 387.)	

5. It had been a busy night for, on probing toward the British, Lee's corps learned that an enemy escort party with Cornwallis's baggage had become lost in the woods, it being a very dark night. The party had been forced to dismount and wait for light of day. Lee's legionnaires went in pursuit and they too, because of the darkness and confused guides, also became lost and had to dismount and wait for dawn. The British slipped away and there was no contact. When the British commander confirmed his supposition of what had happened, it is said he enjoyed a good laugh that Lee had been thwarted. His confirmation evidently came from the interrogation of Coronet John Middleton of Lee's troop, he having been sent to Cornwallis the next day with dispatches from Greene to Cornwallis. (Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 270-72.)

reported: "Lee having proceeded toward the iron-works, found the American army on the 14th at Guilford Court-House, distant about twelve miles from the enemy, and was immediately advanced on the road to the Quaker meeting-house, with orders to post himself within two or three miles of the court-house and to resume his accustomed duties."⁶

The first picket that Tarleton drove in likely was that of Lieutenant James Heard of the Legion cavalry. He, with a party of dragoons, had been sent out by Lee in the evening of the 14th. He had orders "to place himself near the British camp, and to report from time to time such occurrences as might happen." As instructed he sent word back every half hour. Early in the morning, he filed report that a large body of horse was approaching the "meeting-house."

Heard was directed to go with a few of his men down the flank of the enemy to determine if the full British army was in motion. Though passage down the flank was not particularly effective as it was "uniformly interrupted by patrols ranging far from the British line of march," Heard eventually concluded from "the rumbling of wheels" that there was "a general movement." With this word, Greene now ordered Lee "to advance with his cavalry, to bear down these interruptions and to ascertain the truth." Already Lee's "van" had been "called to arms at four in the morning" with instructions "to take breakfast quickly." "This had just been finished, when the last mentioned order from the general Greene was communicated to Lee."⁷ Greene had already concluded that battle was in prospect.

Having driven in the picket the British pressed forward and, as Tarleton wrote: "A sharp conflict ensued between the advanced parties of the two armies. In the onset, the fire of the Americans was heavy, and the charge of their cavalry was spirited."⁸ It was Lee and Tarleton who left the most detailed accounts of this affair,⁹ which took place

6. Ibid., p. 272.

7. Ibid., pp. 272-73.

8. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 277-78.

9. Sergeant William Seymour of the Delaware Continentals, though not a participant in this fighting, did record a thumbnail account of it noting that "This action began about nine o'clock in the morning and continued about the space of an hour and a half." He wrote:

Colonel Lee, with his horse and infantry and a detachment of riflemen, went to observe their the enemy's motion, and meeting with their vanguard, upon which there

"About four miles from Guildford" where "the advanced guard under Tarleton, fell in with Col. Lee's legion and Those other light troops whom they had before engaged."¹⁰

On receipt of orders from Greene, Lee had, as he reported, "instantly mounted, and took the road to the enemy at the head of the horse, having directed the infantry and rifle infantry to follow, the first on his right, and the second on his left." About two miles out Lee met Heard and his party retiring and being followed by Tarleton's horse. Lee, now wishing to get closer to Greene and the main force (at least to get closer to his rifle militia and Legion infantry should the British body be close behind), "ordered the column to retire by troops, taking the proper distance for open evolution." This meant the near troop under Capt. Michael Rudolph would go off at full gallop; the center troop of Capt. Joseph Egerton would follow a bit slower, and the front under Armstrong (which now became the rear) would move in a walk. The British saw "this retrograde movement" as "a rout" and pressed on Armstrong, whose unit absorbed the initial enemy charge. At this point "the enemy emptied their pistols and then raising a shout, pushed a second time upon Armstrong." Armstrong remained "sullen as before, the leading section having nearly closed with us, and drew up."

At this moment, Lee ordering a charge, the dragoons came instantly to the right about, and, in close column, rushed upon the foe. This meeting happened in a long lane, with very high curved fences on each side of the road, which admitted but one section in front... only the front section of each corps closed, Tarleton sounding a retreat, the moment he discovered the column in charge. The whole of the enemy's section was dismounted, and many of the horses prostrated; some of the dragoons killed, the rest made prisoner: not a single American soldier or horse was injured. Tarleton retired with celerity.¹¹

commenced a smart skirmish, in which Colonel Lee's detachment did wonders, obliging the enemy to give way in three different attacks, driving them into their main army, in which they killed and wounded a great number.

(Seymour, "A Journal of the Southern Expedition," Hist. Soc. of Delaware, 2 (Paper XV), 20-21.)

10. Annual Register for 1781, p. 65.

11. Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 273-75.

Then Lee followed in pursuit of Tarleton who, once out of the lane, crossed the Salisbury road and took an obscure way toward the British camp. Lee, who knew the country, "followed the common route by the Quaker meeting-house." He was seeking to cut "the British lieutenant-colonel from his army" by holding him to his left and moving to his front. "By endeavoring to take the whole detachment, he permitted the whole to escape; whereas, had he continued to press on the rear, he must have taken many."¹²

Lee had presumed that Cornwallis was some distance behind. However, his advanced units were closer to him than expected and "as Lee, with his column in full speed got to the New Garden meeting-house,¹³ they encountered the British Guards" who had just gotten there and now displayed in a moment giving "the American cavalry a general fire." Then a hot action occurred.

The sun had just risen above the trees, and shining bright, the refulgence from the British muskets, as the soldier presented, frightened Lee's horse so as to compel him to throw himself off. Instantly remounting another, he ordered a retreat. This manoeuvre was speedily executed, and, while the cavalry were retiring, the Legion infantry came running up with trailed arms, and opened a well-aimed fire upon the guards, which was followed in a few minutes by a volley from the riflemen under Colonel Campbell, who had taken post on the left of the cavalry. The action became very sharp, and was bravely maintained on both sides.¹⁴

12. Ibid., p. 274.

13. Evidently drawing on this action, it was recorded in the diary of the Salem Moravians on March 15: "There was a Battle near Newgarden." (Fries, Records of the Moravians, 4, 1687.) Cornwallis called it "the New-garden Quaker meeting house."

In 1938 William P. Brandon, park historian at Guilford Courthouse NMP, recorded that "The site of the original Meeting House is marked by its foundation stones about two hundred yards from the Guilford College campus, while the present Meeting House is itself on the campus." "The Tarleton Map of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse: A Critical Study" (a typewritten report in draft, copy in the files of Guilford Courthouse NMP), p. 2.

14. Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 274-75.

As Tarleton saw it:

Notwithstanding their numbers and opposition, the gallantry of the light infantry of the guards, assisted by the legion under his command, made impression upon their center, before the 23d regiment arrived to give support to the advanced troops.¹⁵ Colonel Lee's dragoons retreated with precipitation along the main road, and Colonel Campbell's mountaineers were dispersed with considerable loss.¹⁶ The pursuit was not pushed very far, as there were many proofs besides the acknowledgement of the prisoners that General Greene was at hand. Captain Goodrick of the guards,¹⁷ a promising young officer, fell in this contest, and between twenty and thirty of the guards, dragoons, and yagers, were killed and surrounded.¹⁸ The King's troops moved on till they arrived in sight of the Americans. An engagement

15. General Greene reported the encounter thus: "Lieutenant-Colonel Lee, with his legion, his infantry and part of his riflemen, met the enemy, on their advance, and had a very severe skirmish with Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton, in which the enemy suffered greatly. Captain Armstrong charged the British legion, and cut down near thirty of their dragoons, but as they reinforced their advance party, Lieutenant-Colonel Lee was obliged to retire, and take his position in the line." Greene to Samuel Huntington quoted from the New Jersey Journal, April 11 (1781), in The Diary of the American Revolution compiled by Frank Moore and edited by John Anthony Scott (New York, 1967-reissue of the Moore edition of 1876), p. 488.

16. The wounded included Capt. James Tate, a Virginia militia company commander who had shared in Howard's charge at Cowpens and was attached to Lee's party at this time. He received a broken thigh. Another was Lt. Jonathan Snowden of the Legion Infantry who (along with a number of wounded and dead infantrymen and riflemen) was "necessarily left on the field." (Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 274-75.)

17. Among the wounded, too, was Captain Schultz of the Guards. (Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 275n.)

18. In later years it was reported that "At the cross-roads, near the Quaker Meeting-House, off from the side of the Salisbury road, in a little cove at the head of the hollow or valley, are the graves of about twenty soldiers who were buried there after the skirmish; friend and foe alike." David Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81: Being a History of the Invasion of the Carolinas by the British Army Under Lord Cornwallis (Raleigh, N. C., 1889), p. 329.

was now become inevitable, and both sides prepared for it with tranquility and order.¹⁹

Lee's account of this skirmish was similar to that of Tarleton's except in the matter of precipitate retreat. He wrote:

The cavalry having formed again in column, and Lee being convinced, from the appearance of the guards, that Cornwallis was not far in the rear, drew off his infantry; and, covering them from any attempt of the British horse, retired toward the American army.²⁰ General Greene, being immediately advised of what had passed, prepared for battle; not doubting, that the long avoided now wished-for, hour was at hand.²¹

Henry Lee received a number of plaudits for his conduct in the skirmish. Stedman pointed out that "he behaved with great bravery, and maintained his ground with firmness, until the appearance of the twenty-third regiment, advancing to support Tarleton, obliged the Americans to retire with precipitation."²² And Henry Dawson wrote later that "about thirty of the

19. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 278.

Cornwallis reported the opening skirmish only briefly: "About four miles from Guildford our advanced guard, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton, fell in with a corps of the enemy, consisting of Lee's legion, some back-mountain men and Virginia militia, which he attacked with his usual good conduct and spirit, and defeated." (Dispatch No. 8, Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 312.)

20. The British sustained a much heavier loss than the Americans, according to Lee, as their "fire was innocent, overshooting the cavalry entirely; whose caps and accoutrements were all struck with green twigs, cut by the British ball out of the large oaks in the meeting-house yard, under which the cavalry received the volley from the guards." After the battle of Guilford, Lee, as was customary, wrote to Tarleton asking him to care for the wounded of his Legion and rifle-corps. Most of the wounded had been left on the field. Tarleton replied that he would adding that he himself had received "a ball in [his] right hand" in this early morning encounter. (Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 275n.)

21. Ibid., p. 275.

22. The American War, 2, 375.

enemy fell in the attack, while Lieutenant-Colonel Lee and his party, after winning golden opinions, even from his opponents, retired with but little loss."²³

Even Sergeant Lamb of the British 23rd Regiment noted that "The Americans were commanded by general Lee, who behaved with the most undaunted bravery, and maintained himself against the most formidable opposition, until the 23rd regiment advancing to the support of Tarleton compelled him to give way." (Occurrences During the Late American War, pp. 348-49.)

23. Battles of the United States, 1, 664.

William Gordon estimated that Lee's dragoons killed or wounded about fifty of Tarleton's men and stated that Campbell's riflemen were thought to have killed and wounded more than a hundred infantry. These, however, surely were exaggerated figures. (Establishment of Independence of the United States, 3, 174.)

CHAPTER IV

The Set for Action

Following the encounter east of and at the New Garden Meeting House "four miles from Guilford" Courthouse, Lee fell back according to instructions to join the main American Army.¹ Cornwallis reformed his line of march and continued along the Salisbury-Hillsboro "great road" still headed toward Guilford Courthouse and battle. He wrote that "we found the rebel army posted on rising grounds about a mile and a half from the court house."²

As for General Greene, he had been busy with the deployment of his forces. He had been awake and active that morning, March 15, since the first confirmation was received that the British army was on the march toward him. His troops needed to be fed and then placed in the positions he had selected before the arrival of the enemy on the field. He described the battlefield generally as follows:³

The greater part of this country is a wilderness, with a few cleared fields interspersed here and there. The army was drawn up on a large hill of ground, surrounded by other hills, the greater part of which was covered with timber and thick underbrush. The front line was posted with two field pieces just on the edge of the woods, and back of a fence, which ran parallel with the line, with an open field directly in their front. The second line was in the woods, about three hundred yards in the rear of the first; and the continental troops about four hundred yards in the rear of the second, with a double front, as the hill drew to a point where they were posted; and on the right and left were two old fields.

1. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 275.

2. He was ill-informed about the American troop disposition and the topography of the area, he contended. Prisoners taken by Tarleton could not give him much help since they had been several days with the "advance corps" and lacked word on the American "order or position." Also, "the country people were extremely inaccurate in their description of the ground." (Cornwallis to Germain, March 17; quoted in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 312.)

3. Greene to Huntington, letter of March 16 (Quoted in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 323); see also the letter given in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 497.

In this position we waited the approach of the enemy, having previously sent off the baggage to this place ["Camp, at the iron works, ten miles from Guilford Court house"] appointed to rendezvous at, in case of a defeat.

As Cornwallis viewed the same area he too described it:⁴

Immediately between the head of the column and the enemy's line was a considerable plantation, one large field of which was on our left of the road, and two others, with a wood of about two hundred yards broad, between them on our right of it; beyond these fields the wood continued for several miles to our right. The wood beyond the plantation in our front, in the skirt of which the enemy's first line was formed was about a mile in depth, the road then leading into an extensive space of cleared ground about Guildford court house. The woods on our right and left were reported to be impractical for cannon; but as that on our right appeared the most open, I resolved to attack the left wing of the enemy.

As it unfolded, generally stated, the Guilford battle covered an area of perhaps a mile and a half in length, from east to west. It was along both sides of the old Salisbury, or New Garden, Road which ran generally east and west through this area.⁵ It spread over an area, north to south, of from perhaps a scant half mile in the beginning to three quarters of a mile or more as the fighting intensified. It was all west of the courthouse and in the area of nearly a mile and a quarter between two lesser creek beds, those of Little Horse Pen and Hunting. The courthouse area would, however, become involved with retreat movements at the battle's end and be a point of general reference in the battle.⁶ Already, too,

4. Cornwallis to Germain, March 17 (in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 312-13).

5. This has been successfully demonstrated in Brandon's "The Tarleton Map" report.

6. See Hatch, Guilford Courthouse and Environs, Chapter VIII, for a more complete discussion of the battlefield including the lay of the land, roads, creeks, streams and springs, hills and rivers, fields and woods, forest cover, and such.

it had most surely served for bivouac and encampment purposes for Greene's army.

The battle was fought on rising, undulating ground.⁷ East of Little Horse Pen Creek,⁸ from which point Cornwallis could see the first American line some 600 yards away, there was a long, gentle grade which then leveled out for the next 750 yards or so. Then there was some rougher terrain, perhaps 125 yards of it, rising to a point south of the road from which there was visibility across a little valley involving several ravines perhaps 300 yards across. East of the valley there was an elevation (north of the road) overlooking these same vales, or ravines, where the final action would come. The road continued another 400 yards eastward across the ravines and then the Hunting Creek, on to a rising grade, at first steep, then gradual, to the courthouse.

There is also a rather thorough coverage of topography and terrain features in Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 316-17 and elsewhere. He saw the battlefield when it was much less changed than now having noted: "Halfway up this hill [Just east of Little Horse Pen], on the southern side, is the Hoskins farm house, which is still standing, and occupied [1889] by the grandchildren of the proprietor who owned it in 1781, and to whose credit be it said, he never allowed the face of the battle field to be changed any more than was absolutely necessary" (p. 316).

7. The Tarleton map, or that which appeared in his Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, is presumed to have been based on field notes, sketches, or both. It is the only contemporary plan of the action and area with the possible exception of that done by Capt. Henry Brown who fought at Guilford. The "Tarleton Map" became the basis for most later accounts which actually have added little to it except complication. Exceptions would be the plans of E. W. Caruthers and David Schenck, both of whom were longtime serious students of the battlefield. (See Illustrations No. 4, 5, 7, 8.)

8. William Johnson described this creek crossing quite graphically. About a mile and a half from the courthouse, he related: "the road winds between thick coverts of copse-wood, leaving a defile of only a few rods between them. The thickets then turn off to the right and left, and the ground ascends gradually, and with some undulations." Sketches of the Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene (Charleston, S. C., 1822), 2, 4-5.

For the most part the battle area was forest covered ("a deep forest of lofty trees"), often thick with underbrush though there were fields, old fields, and related open farm areas that featured in the battle plan and execution. There were the several open fields perhaps four or five hundred yards in extent, in the west end of the battle area across which the opening British attack was launched.⁹ This was just beyond and away from a fork created by two slight branches (vales) of Little Horse Pen Creek. There was a cluster of open fields, too, in the courthouse vicinity and westward from it on both sides of the road to the area, across Hunting Creek, where the crucial action came.¹⁰

Evidently this ground was then but thinly settled and cultivated. Tarleton's plan of the battleground¹¹ indicates but one house cluster in association with the fields at the west end. In the east end he notes the "Court House" and but two "farm clusters," one directly across the road from the courthouse and another west of it, perhaps almost in the battle area proper. There was, too, a single structure immediately at the juncture of Reedy Fork and the New Garden Road. There is nothing to indicate that any substantial town, or village, existed at this time.

Nathanael Greene was ready with his battle plan and knew precisely how he wanted his various units placed to meet the oncoming enemy. He was familiar with the area in detail, having studied it and tallied its advantage and disadvantages. He was prepared to act quickly and he did. As William Seymour related: "On the fifteenth in the morning the British Army, commanded by Lord Cornwallis and General Lesley, advanced in order to give us battle, upon which General Greene drew up his army at Guilford Court House and waited the motion of the enemy, Colonel Washington's horse and infantry being posted on the right flank of the army."¹²

9. These it was said "the summer before had been worked in corn," this likely being a paraphrase of Henry Lee's "open ground, which appeared to have been cultivated in corn the preceding summer." John Hill Wheeler, Historical Sketches of North Carolina from 1584 and 1851 (Philadelphia, 1851), 2, 173.

10. North of the road in front of the American third line, "This was clear of wood, having only the usual growth of shrubbery, and small saplings found in old fields. Alongside the road also, in the lane between the fields, there was a growth of saplings which overtopped the fences." (Johnson, Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 4-5.)

11. See Illustration No. 4.

12. "A Journal of the Southern Expedition" Hist. Soc. of Delaware, 2 (Paper XV), 20.

The latter was a detail that Seymour most likely clearly remembered. The Delaware company of which he was a part went to help strengthen this flank. Another soldier, Samuel Houston, also wrote of that morning from a personal point of view:¹³ "We often paraded, and about ten o'clock, lying about our fires, we heard our light infantry and cavalry, who were down near the English lines, begin firing with the enemy. Then we immediately fell into our ranks, and our brigades marched out."

On his way home to Virginia Daniel Morgan, on February 20, had paused to write Greene, much as if following up on discussions that they had had prior to his departure from Guilford Courthouse. He offered suggestions on the disposition of the American troops should battle come:

I expect Lord Cornwallis will push you until you are obliged to fight him, on which much will depend. We have, from what I see, a great number of militia. If they fight you will beat Cornwallis; if not, he will beat you, and perhaps cut your regulars to pieces, which will be losing all our hopes.

I am informed that among the militia will be found a number of old soldiers. I think it would be advisable to select them from among the militia, and put them in the ranks with the regulars; select the riflemen also, and fight them on the flanks, under enterprising officers who are acquainted with that kind of fighting; and put the militia in the centre, with some picked troops in the rear, with orders to shoot down the first man that runs. If anything will succeed, a disposition of this kind will. I hope you will not look on this as dictating, but as my opinion on a matter that I am much concerned in.¹⁴

Obviously Greene drew much from this and the excellent results that had come from similar deployment at the Cowpens on January 17.¹⁵ He used

13. The Houston "Journal" as quoted in William H. Foote's Sketches of Virginia Historical and Biographical, 2nd Series (Philadelphia, 1856), p. 143.

14. Quoted in Graham, Daniel Morgan, p. 370.

15. It was noted in the Annual Register for 1781: "The similarity between Greene's disposition on this day, and those which had lately succeeded so well with Morgan cannot fail of striking everyone who attentively considers both; the resemblance will likewise appear in some parts of the action, as well as in the plan or design" (p. 67).

three lines, the first two basically all militia supported on the flanks much as Morgan suggested. In regard to pulling the experienced militiamen to support the regulars, this he refrained from doing on any large scale likely out of consideration for the militia commanders. He asked his front line militia to give two rounds expecting that this would slow the British and do them some damage. The next line could then inflict heavy casualties. The third line, the experienced continentals, could then move to capitalize on any weaknesses, or false moves, that the enemy might show, or make.¹⁶

The American front line was composed of North Carolina militia,¹⁷ more than a thousand, in two brigades under Brigadier Generals John Butler and Thomas Eaton. Eaton's brigade, made up of men chiefly from Halifax and Warren counties, was north of, with its left resting on, the New Garden Road. Butler's brigade (chiefly Orange, Guilford, and Granville men) had a like deployment on the south side of the road,¹⁸ each with a front of perhaps some 400 yards. In the main they were aligned behind a stout rail (zig-zag) fence in front of which were the open fields of the Hoskins plantation. In depth these fields along the north side of the road were some 350 yards and those adjoining it on the road's south side perhaps 450 while the smaller field more to the south was less, some 250 yards. Tarleton succinctly stated it: "The center was placed behind

16. Higginbotham, Daniel Morgan, p. 158; Graham, Daniel Morgan, p. 371; Hugh F. Rankin, The American Revolution (New York, 1964), p. 281; Alden, The South in the Revolution, p. 275; Alden, The American Revolution (New York, 1954), p. 347.

Higginbotham believed that Greene erred in putting his lines too far apart. At the Cowpens Morgan used a 150 yard interval whereas Greene used 300 and 500 yards respectively. This Higginbotham believed was too much to enable the militia to retreat orderly when pressed.

17. Much has been said about the quality, or lack of it, of these just-recruited raw militia troops. Perhaps Henry B. Carrington in his evaluation considered the ordinary rank and file of these men and not the more determined small units and stubborn individual soldiers. In any case he wrote: "A portion of the North Carolina militia had been forced into service, under suspicion of disloyalty, as a punishment, and with here and there a few substitutes, and with good officers, it was a feeble force to resist any persistent attack of British troops. Its flanks were so well covered, however, that General Greene must have had faith in their ability to make some resistance, when thus well supported and so admirably disposed." Battles of the Revolution (New York, 1876), p. 557.

18. "Butler's brigade commenced at the road in which the American artillery was placed, and extended south, along the fence, and beyond as

rails, in the rear of a clearing about three hundred yards space, and the flanks extended into the woods."¹⁹

The North Carolina militia was actually the long center of the first line. Greene described the right flank²⁰ as made up of: "Lieutenant-colonel William Washington, with the dragoons of the 1st and 3rd regiments, a detachment of light infantry composed of continental troops, and a regiment of riflemen, under Colonel Charles Lynch." This "formed a corps of observation for the security of our right north flank." The continental troops (about 80 of them) were Capt. Robert Kirkwood's Delawares and the riflemen (several contingents grouped) numbered some 200. The continentals and riflemen, all in the woods, continued the militia line, but obliquely forward through the woods into a low marshy vale on their right. Behind them, also, in the woods, near the point where the flank corps met the north end of the militia line, was Washington with his cavalry, a veteran unit numbering nearly 100 troopers.

There was similar flank extension on the left. "Lieutenant-colonel Lee, with his legion, a detachment of light infantry, and a corps of riflemen, under Colonel William Campbell, formed a corps of observation for the security of our left flank." The strength of this was comparable to that on the right. Lee's Legion horse numbered some 75 and his light infantry another 80. There was, too, a detachment of "mounted militia" under Major Read. The riflemen grouped here numbered, by Greene's estimate, some 250 under "the famous Col. Campbell."²¹ This "formed a covering party for our left." Like that on the right, it was largely in the woods and angled forward from its juncture with the south end of the North Carolina militia line. Behind the point of juncture Lee posted his horse as if in reserve, ready for emergency.

far as necessary." E. W. Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents: and Sketches of Character Chiefly in the "Old North State," 2nd Series (Philadelphia, 1856), p. 141.

19. Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 278.

20. He outlines his deployment more carefully than elsewhere in his letter of March 16 to Samuel Huntington (given in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 322 ff.).

21. Greene to Morgan, March 20 (in Graham, Daniel Morgan, p. 375); Lee, Campaigns of 1781, p. 168.

Both flanks were strong in experienced fighters, many of them battle-hardened. That on the right extended the first line perhaps some 250 yards northward while that on the left added at least an equal distance in that direction. Their being angled forward could permit enfilading fire into the advancing enemy, as did happen. Thus the first line had an overall length of some 1300 yards, considerably longer than the British initially estimated since much of each end of it was in the woods and concealed.²²

The New Garden Road bisected the line, separating the brigades of Eaton north of it and Butler to the south. In the road itself Greene placed two of his four six-pounder cannon. These, under the command of Capt. Anthony Singleton, a Virginia officer, were just in advance of the line itself. The orders were for this artillery to move with the flow of the militia to make its contribution, as possible, and to avoid isolation and capture. They were "within close shot of the rivulet, where the enemy, keeping the road, would pass."²³

From the east edge of the Hoskins farm fields to the first open ground west of the courthouse the area was thickly wooded. It was here in the woods some 300 yards²⁴ behind the first line that Greene established his second. This, like the first line, was composed of militia troops, these from Virginia, in two brigades. That extending northward from the

David Schenck, a thorough student of the subject, with some logic and documentation, would place the left flank support at a much higher figure. Excluding the cavalry, he estimates it at 500. Perhaps some of these were actually in, and a part of, the North Carolina militia line where Schenck would place the separate command of Col. Arthur Forbis of Alamance. (North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 322-25.)

22. As James Grant interestingly described it: "Greene's first line was formed behind a high rail, where the men were enabled by their fire to command on open space 300 yards in width. A cloud of skirmishers, in hunting shirts supported it. Each flank reached to the woods that grew on both sides of the position, in the rear were woods, full of cavalry and infantrymen." British Battles on Land and Sea (London-New York, 188-), 2, 171.

23. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 275. In his Campaigns of 1781 (p. 168) Lee places the artillery as "within cannon shot of the stream."

24. It is generally agreed that it was just about this distance though such other figures have been offered as 400 yards by Tarleton and 240 paces by James Grant.

road was under the command of Brig. Gen. Robert Lawson and that southward from the road, Brig. Gen. Edward Stevens. Stevens, who well remembered the flight of his militia at Camden, took a now accepted precaution. Some twenty yards behind his line he set up another line of sentinels, picked men whom he trusted, with orders to shoot down any militiaman who broke ranks and ran.²⁵

As Stevens himself later phrased it in a letter to Henry Lee: "I posted in my rear a number of riflemen, behind trees, as you know we were formed in a skirt of woods. I informed my men that they were placed there to shoot the first man that might run, and at the same time they would serve to cover their retreat in case of necessity."²⁶

The Virginia militia line, perhaps a thousand yards in extent, had no independent flank support. It was the plan that the flank (security) support on both ends of the first line would fall back as the North Carolina militia fulfilled its function and left the field, and hook up with the second line thus extending and supporting it. It was the plan, too, that these flank support units would hold their form in slow withdrawal and in turn join the third line, the continentals, as the fighting progressed.

Greene succinctly described his third and final position, "the third line consisting of two brigades, one of Virginia, and one of Maryland continental troops commanded by General Brigadier Isaac Huger and Colonel Ortho Williams." This position, generally backed by woods, curved around the brow of an elevation that looked out to the south and west, some 500 and 250 yards, over the old fields and farm area just west

25. This was as Morgan had suggested, but there is no word that any other unit commander followed this lead. It may have had some bearing on the more determined stand that Steven's brigade is supposed to have made. Carrington commented on the Stevens precaution: "Behind this line Stevens had placed a few veterans to keep the militia up to duty...old soldiers...to anticipate any disorder, as many of the Virginia militia also, were raw troops, then for the first time brought to the field." (Battles of the Revolution, p. 557.)

26. Campaigns of 1781, pp. 182-83.

William Gordon and David Ramsay wrote that there were 40 riflemen so posted at equal distances, 20 paces to the rear. Gordon, Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 174; Ramsay, The History of the American Revolution (Dublin, 1792), p. 535.

of Hunting Creek. It was some 500 yards²⁷ behind the second line and all north of the New Garden Road. As established the line extended perhaps 750 yards and included some 1400 Continentals. The Virginia brigade was on the American right, the Maryland on the left, each with two regiments. From left to right it was the Second Maryland Regiment of Col. Benjamin Ford, basically a unit of new, untried recruits. Next was the well-tested 1st Maryland led by Col. John Gunby seconded by Lt. Col. John Eager Howard. Then came the Virginia regiment of Isaac Huger, whose command place was taken by Lt. Col. Samuel Hawes when Huger became brigade commander. The last regiment, another Virginia one, was commanded by Col. John Green. The regiments of the Virginia brigade (which had not fought together as a unit before), though of long service, were heavily manned by new recruits, many of the old returnees of three years service having been discharged some time before. The veterans still with the regiments were enough to give it leaven.²⁸

In the curve of the line between his two brigades Greene placed two of his six pounders with Lieutenant Finley in charge of them. The other two, down the road, were under instructions to come into position on the extreme left adjacent to the left of the Second Maryland, as they eventually did.

Tarleton reported that the units of the third line were "posted facing the wood where the two lines of militia were drawn up. General Greene had chosen open ground, in front of the court house, for the great part of his regulars. The flanks did not dress up to the center, but were drawn back, so that each brigade presented a different front: two six-pounders were placed on a small eminence which looked upon the road. The position of these brigades was near six hundred yards in the rear of

27. Contemporary references vary a great deal on this distance. Some estimate it as 300, some 400, and even 575 (Tarleton made it 600). Perhaps the comment of David Schenck is pertinent here: "I have located the second and third lines at the places indicated by William Johnson and Henry Lee, and they are at least five hundred and fifty (550) yards apart by actual measurement. I am quite familiar with every foot of the battle-ground and visit it very often. I have measured all the distances on it." (North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 326.)

28. Henry Lee in commenting on the continental regiments wrote: "Of these, only the regiment of Gunby was veteran; the three others were composed of new soldiers, among whom were mingled a few who had served from the beginning of the war; but all officers were experienced and approved." (Memoirs of the War, p. 275-276.)

the second line."²⁹

Behind the third line Greene had the way clear for withdrawal, or retreat, a necessary precaution. Roads here ran to the north, northeast, and east. By general understanding, if at all possible (as it would be) the Reedy Fork Road would be used.

With his lines fixed and his men in place he reviewed the field and the placements, pointedly giving special encouragement to the North Carolina militia line. He rode along this front position reminding the men that they were fighting for liberty and independence as well as for homes and families. He asked that they give the enemy two good volleys³⁰ and, with this check to the enemy, they could retire from the field. Likely Alexander Garden, one of Lee's legionnaires in the battle, summarized it correctly: "The North Carolina militia were assured by General Green that if they would only preserve their station long enough to give their enemy two fires they should obtain his free permission to retire from the field."³¹ They would not be expected to take the feared British bayonet charge. Commanders in the second line had instructions to let

29. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 279.

Lee described it, too: "The third line, formed of continentals entirely, occupied the crest of a hill about four hundred yards further back, which, overlooking a field of irregular surface, sloped to the wood held by the second line. Its flanks were not made to dress up with the centre, but were drawn back, so as to conform horizontally with the verge of the hill." (Campaigns of 1781, p. 168.)

30. This instruction for two shots is covered in detail, unduly belabored, perhaps, by Schenck (North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 334-44). See also Rankin, The American Revolution, pp. 281-82.

31. Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War in America (Charleston, S. C., 1822), p. 40.

According to his own report Henry Lee also "rode along the front line from one end to the other, exhorting them to stand firm, and not be afraid of the British; for he had whipped them three times that morning, and could do it again." (Quoted in Scheer and Rankin, Rebels and Redcoats, p. 446.)

them filter through to the rear at the proper time.³²

Even so it is evident that many along that line were having troubled thoughts as they waited. Maj. Richard Harrison of Granville County was one of these and he used the interval to scribble a hasty note to his wife who that very day was due to give birth to a child. He wrote to his Nancy: "It is scarcely possible to paint the agitations of my mind (if it were worth the while), struggling with two of the greatest events that are in nature at the same time--the fate of my Nancy and my Country. O, my God, I trust them with thee; and so with them for the best!"³³

Having convinced himself that all was in order, General Greene returned to a position with his third line to await developments which would not be long in coming. He could be pleased with his situation as both friend and foe, contemporary and later, agreed that he was well situated for battle. Tarleton noted that his position "was extremely well chosen, and the manner of forming his troops unexceptional." The American army, Stedman agreed, "is allowed on all hands to have been strongly and judiciously posted, on ground chosen with care, and most excellently adapted to the nature of the troops that occupied it."³⁴

Actually Greene had another concern because of his good position. "The whole were so strongly posted, that Greene was fearful lest Cornwallis should not attack them in front, but change his position and fall upon the flanks." But only the "front line was in sight, the two others being covered by the wood in which they were posted." Also only two cannon

32. It was reported, for example, that General Stevens in particular "had the address to prevent his brigade from receiving any bad impression from the retreating North Carolinians, by giving out that they had orders to retire after discharging their pieces. To cherish this idea he ordered his men to open their files to favor their passage." (Gordon, Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 174.)

33. Letter dated March 15 from Richard Harrison to Anne Harrison quoted in Scheer and Rankin, Rebels and Redcoats, p. 446, from the American Historical Register, No. 10 (June 1895), p. 1123.

Harrison continued: "The day seems nearly at hand that will render North Carolina perfectly happy or completely miserable. Our general is a great and good man, his army numerous and apparently confident of victory.... If we succeed against Lord Cornwallis, we expect to be discharged instantly, for by that time the Continental troops will eat all the provisions this country and South Carolina afford.... This is the very day that I hope will be given me a creature capable of enjoying what its father hopes to deserve and earn--the sweets of Liberty and Grace."

34. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 284; Stedman, The American War, 2, 382.

were showing in the front.³⁵

In commenting on Greene's deployment and battle plan Carrington gives this evaluation:

The formation of the army for battle has been severely criticized, on the ground that the regulars were so far in the rear; but the flanking bodies in the first line were fully equal in number to the small veteran corps of the reserve, and they were men who had tested their mettle thoroughly on other fields. The disposition of the troops seems to have so equalized the commands as to impart strength to all parts, and to leave the militia alone, at no point. If Kirkwood's command had covered Singleton's guns in the centre, possibly it would have strengthened the line; but might have sacrificed him, with the militia; and the supports were near enough, if there had been any resistance at all.³⁶

Thus the Americans were ready and waiting³⁷ as the head of Cornwallis' column began to move through the curving defile across Little Horse Pen Creek.³⁸ Then, as the road began to straighten out, Americans and British saw each other. This was the signal for the two cannon stationed in the road with the first American line to open fire. Capt. Arthur Singleton did this with dispatch. Cornwallis thereupon halted his column and advanced

35. Gordon, Establishment of Independence of United States, 3, 174.

36. Battles of the Revolution, p. 558.

37. Greene himself wrote to Thomas Jefferson on March 16 that "We were in perfect readiness to receive them." (Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 156-57.)

And William Gordon added a bit to this; "On the morning of the 15th the Americans were supplied with provisions, and a gill of rum per man; and orders were issued for the whole to be in perfect readiness for action." (Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 173.)

38. Lee, who knew the country and had already crossed this creek several times, wrote generally and then specifically about it: "The country to a wide extent around, waste and rolling, was covered with lofty trees and thick shrubby underwood. Narrow tangled glades wound between the hills and desolated spots of forsaken cultivation, and presenting, far as the eye could trace them, somewhat livelier vegetation, dripped

his own artillery to answer the American guns. As he noted: "I ordered Lieutenant Macleod to bring forward the guns 3-pounders and cannonade their center." As Henry Lee observed, "McCleod, commanding the royal artillery, hastened up with two pieces, and stationing himself in the road near the rivulet, returned our fire."³⁹ It was just past mid-day on a clear, cool early spring day. As Lee recalled it, "the atmosphere was calm, and illumined with a cloudless sun; the season rather cold than cool; the body braced and the wind high toned by the state of the weather."⁴⁰

Evidently the cannonade began some time just after noon and went on for at least a half hour, perhaps a little longer. Comment on the precise time of beginning and the actual duration varies according to the reporter. Greene himself gave about noon as the starting time. Henry Lee's 10:00 a.m. seems much too early and William Gordon's 1:30 p.m. ("about half an hour after one til two") too late. St. George Tucker assumed that the firing continued some 20 to 30 minutes while William Seymour thought it was a shorter interval.⁴¹

their scant rills into a larger stream and a darker valley, that crossed the great Salisbury road about two miles from the courthouse." (Campaigns of 1781, pp. 167-68.)

39. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 313; Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 246.

40. Ibid., p. 283.

Robert Graves gives this description through his Sergeant Roger Lamb: "After a frosty night, the sun shone benignantly and warmed our stiff bodies; while the croaking of frogs and the twittering of birds pleasantly reminded us that the Spring was now well advanced." He could, nonetheless honestly complain that "Life without a daily issue of grog was uncomfortable, I own, for the old soldiers." Proceed, Sergeant Lamb (New York, c. 1941), p. 181.

Caruthers wrote that "the day had been cool and clear, but towards evening the clouds gathered and a cold driving rain commenced, which continued through the night." Only Samuel Houston recalled that it "was rainy in the morning," but on this his memory must have been in error though a British participant did comment that the fields over which he initially moved were wet and muddy from recent rains. Perhaps he was bothered by the results of a heavy frost, or a light freeze. (Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 166; Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., p. 143.)

41. Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 174.

It was in this interval of the cannonade that the British commander pulled back his advance units and brought up his rear ones until all were through the defile and across the creek where he began to deploy them. This was under the cover of woods both to the right and left of the road with some additional cover likely coming from the smoke of the repeating cannon. Tarleton noted that: "As the front of the British column approached the open ground facing the American position, the enemy's six pounders opened from the road, and were immediately answered by the royal artillery."⁴²

Lee, who seemingly was off in this timing, described it a little differently: "About ten in the forenoon, the head of their column appeared on an eminence beyond the stream, when Singleton opened a well-directed fire, which the royal artillery quickly returned. In the face of our cannonade, and under cover of their own, the British army steadily advanced, and passing the stream displayed into line."⁴³

As Charles Magill, a staff aid to General Huger, summarized it: "The British then moved on with the utmost rapidity, and whilst displaying their Column kept up a heavy Cannonade with four Field Pieces upon [our] two posted in the road under the command of Capt. Singleton who returned it with considerable damage."⁴⁴ From a British view, the royal artillery "commanded the enemy's center with considerable effect ~~though~~ Lieutenant O'Hara a spirited young officer was unfortunately killed, whilst directing the three pounders before the line was ready to move."⁴⁵

Seymour commented: "By this time their main army advanced and began a brisk cannonade. Our cannon at the same time began to play, which continued for the space of a quarter of an hour without intermission, at which time the small arms on both sides" began to fire. "A Journal of the Southern Expedition" Hist. Soc. of Delaware, 2 (Paper XV), 20.

42. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 279-80.

In the words of Cornwallis: "Their cannon fired on us whilst we were forming from the center of the line of militia, but were withdrawn to the continentals before the attack." (Ibid., p. 316.)

43. Lee, Campaigns of 1781, p. 170. He also concluded: "This evolution, executed with celerity and order, was as imposing as splendid, and impressed the American front line with more awe than admiration."

44. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 162.

45. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 279, 280.

St. George Tucker wrote that "A cannonade of half an hour ushered in the battle--a most tremendous fire. Our friend Skipwith was posted in express direction of the shot, and, with his battalion; maintained his post during a tremendous fire with a firmness that does him much honor." But the British cannon did have some effect. Tucker continued: "Major Hubbard, of Colonel Mumfords regiment, had the skirt of his surtout shot away by a Cannon ball, and his horse slightly wounded by the same. There were not, however, above ten men killed and wounded during the whole cannonade, in which I believe, six pieces of artillery were constantly employed for half an hour."⁴⁶

Now knowing that the American army was posted and waiting ahead Cornwallis again consulted his guides concerning the nature of the country, and viewed as much as he could of the disposition of the militia to his front. He noted that: "The woods on our right and left were reported to be impracticable for cannon; but as that on our right appeared the most open, I resolved to attack the left wing of the enemy."⁴⁷

Cornwallis directed that the attack be made in the following order:

On the right, the regiment of Bose and the 71st regiment, led by Major-general Alexander Leslie, and supported by the 1st battalion of guards; on the left, the 23d and 33d regiments, led by Lieutenant-colonel Webster, and supported by the grenadiers and 2d battalion of guards, commanded by Brigadier-general Charles O'Hara; the Yagers and light infantry of the guards remained in the wood on the left of the guns, and the cavalry in the road, ready to act as circumstances might require.⁴⁸

46. This was in a letter of March 18, "The Southern Campaign: 1781," Mag. of Am. History, 7, 40-42.

Caruthers recorded later that: "For twenty minutes or more, a brisk cannonade was kept up on both sides, but without much damage to either. One or two of Butler's men, and nearly the whole of Singleton's artillery horses were killed, while the British received little or no injury; but under cover of the smoke raised by their own cannon, which concealed them from the view of the American..." the British deployed. (Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd. ser., p. 110.)

47. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 279; Cornwallis to Germain, March 17 (also in Tarleton, Campaigns, pp. 312-13).

48. Ibid.

Leslie's brigade on the British left, south of the road, embraced some 565 rank and file and officers.⁴⁹ There were the 244 in the 71st Regiment and 321 in the German Regiment of Bose, under Major DuBuy, spread initially along a 550-yard front. This increased another hundred yards when Leslie brought his reserves into the line. They were the approximately 200 in the Guards' first battalion, under the command of Colonel Norton, and would increase the strength in line to something approaching 800.

North of the road and perpendicular to it was the brigade of James Webster, numbering less than 500 (238 in the 23rd adjacent to the road and 234 in the 33rd regiment just beyond it) and spread along a 450-yard front. This would expand to some 600 yards when he brought in his reserves, consisting of the 84 yagers and the Guards light infantry (perhaps 50) which would come in on his extreme left. It would include as well the Second Battalion of Guards⁵⁰ with the grenadiers (perhaps 250 in all), which would move in on the right just north of the road between the road and the 23rd regiment giving him a strength of near 850 men in line.⁵¹

This left only Tarleton's cavalry (some 272) in the road behind the cannon after the yagers and light infantry had moved from their position "left of the guns" to strengthen Webster's extreme left.

The artillery detachment embraced four pieces--3-pounders--and some 50 men who remained with the cannon moving eastward as the battle raged "along the high road."

As Tarleton noted: ⁵²

Whilst these British troops were forming, the yagers, and the light infantry of the guards remained near the guns in the road, but when the line moved on, they attached themselves to the left of Webster's brigade....

49. These figures are based on the "Field Return of the Troops under the Command of Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis in the Action at Guilford 15th March 1781." Given in full as part of Appendix B.

50. As Tarleton stated: "Brigadier-general O'Hara was instructed to support Col. Webster with the 2d battalion and the grenadier company of the guards." (Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 279-80.)

51. Nothing has been seen to indicate that the 23rd went on later to operate south of the road as some writers have concluded. The same is true essentially for the second battalion and grenadiers of the Guards.

52. Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 280.

The Tarleton battle plan shows only three cannon in place for the opening cannonade.

The dragoons likewise could only move in column in the same east direction, and Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton was ordered to keep his regiment in reserve till the infantry could penetrate through the woods to the open ground, near the court house, where the country was represented to be more favorable for the operation of cavalry.

CHAPTER V

The American First Line Gives Way

Early in the afternoon on that "eventful Thursday,"¹ March 15, 1781, the British formations were ready to move out on the attack. Sir Thomas Saumarez of the 23rd (Royal Welch Fusiliers) Regiment put it tersely and perhaps as accurately as any: "About one o'clock the action commenced."² Cornwallis estimated the time at 1:30 p.m. for "an action which lasted an hour and a half" and Greene stated quite generally that the "battle began about twelve o'clock, lasted about two hours."³

The British came on in precise formation with guns and bayonets glistening in the sun, all in close step, toward the American line. Initially most of the advancing troops moved across the open fields where trees and brush did not impede them. Methodically they reduced the 400 yards of distance that separated them from their objective. When they were some 150 yards away a general volley of musket and rifle fire greeted them from the North Carolina militia. The fight was on. Though this first fire was not particularly effective, the distance being too great, it did sting the oncoming troops. The British withheld their own answering volley through this and the continuing scattered militia fire in their front. The officers wanted a more effective range, which came when they were some 50 yards away. On order the British readied themselves and in due course delivered their fire in unison following it with shouts and a charge with their ready bayonets. The sight of the bayonet and the British precision was enough to send most of the militia scurrying for safety in the rear though some stood to deliver their concluding fire before flight.

Thus the militia center of the first American line rather quickly disintegrated. The enemy went over, and through, the fences, entered the woods, and headed toward the second American line some 300 yards away, their line still being rather well formed. This was in the center to the

1. Foote, Sketches of North Carolina, p. 279.

2. Quoted in Maj. Rowland Broughton-Mainwaring, Historical Record of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, Late the Twenty-third Regiment, or Royal Welsh Fusiliers (London, 1889), p. 101.

3. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 313; Moore and Scott, Diary of the American Revolution, p. 492.

William Gordon called it "a battle of near two hours" and Samuel Houston recalled that the battle lasted "two hours and twenty-five minutes." Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 174; Houston "Journal" (Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., 143-44).

north and south of the New Garden Road, down which Singleton had withdrawn with his two 6-pounders as prearranged.

This was in the center, but all was not so precise for the British on their flanks. Here, where there was more experience and discipline, the Americans held stubbornly for a time. Extending beyond the British line, they were well placed in the woods and positioned to pour in an enfilading fire on both ends. Cornwallis and his brigade commanders were forced to make adjustments, to extend their lines by bringing in all support and reinforcing infantry.

This in thumbnail reviews the British assault on the American first line, though it does not suggest the variety in detail of movement and action that came along the line nor of the personal involvement in the fighting itself. Lieutenant Saumarez of the British 23rd gives some of this.⁴ His unit moved eastward on the north side of the road.

The Royal Welch Fusiliers had to attack the enemy in front, under every disadvantage, having to march over a field lately ploughed, which was wet and muddy from the rains which had recently fallen. The enemy, greatly superior in numbers, were most advantageously posted on a rising ground and behind rails.⁵ The regiment marched to the attack under a most galling and destructive fire, which it could return only by an occasional volley. No troops could behave better than the regiment and the little army did at this period, as they never returned the enemy's fire but by word of command, and marched on with the most undaunted courage.

When at length they got within a few yards of the Americans' first line, they gave a volley, and charged with such impetuosity as to cause them to retreat, which they did to the right and left flanks, leaving the front of the British troops exposed to the fire of a second line of the enemy, which was formed behind brushwood.

4. Quoted in Broughton-Mainwaring, Royal Welch Fusiliers, pp. 100-01.

5. As has been noted the rail fence is well documented and contemporary references say nothing of it being rotten or in disrepair. This latter note entered the accounts penned at later times.

By another account, that of Charles Stedman, the British line when formed, on orders, "moved forward with that steady and guarded, but firm and determined resolution which discipline alone can confer." Webster's brigade moved across "the open ground, exposed to the enemy's fire." Stedman continued:⁶

At the distance of one hundred and forty yards they received the enemy's first fire, but continued to advance unmoved. When arrived at a nearer and more convenient distance, they delivered their own fire, and rapidly charged with their bayonets. The enemy did not wait the shock, but retreated behind their second line.⁷

William Gordon tells essentially the same story relating that:

6. Stedman, History of the American War, 2, 376-77.

This is based on the Tarleton and Cornwallis descriptions, that are cited later.

7. And by still another British account, seemingly based in part on Saumarez:

"The British continued to advance in profound silence, with bayonets fixed and muskets sloped, till within 150 [50] yards from the Americans, when a sudden flash seemed to pass along the line, as the troops cocked, at what is now called 'the recover' with all their barrels upright; in another second they were at the aiming position, and poured in their fire deliberately, coolly, and with terrible effect; for when the smoke rose the Americans were seen lying over each other in heaps beyond the railing.

"It could scarcely be expected that, though so numerous, a brigade of half-disciplined militia would cross their bayonets with such troops as the 23rd and 71st Highlanders. The North Carolina men never paused to make a trial, but broke and fled almost before the advancing columns had traversed half the space that intervened between them." (Grant, British Battles, 2, 171.)

The British advanced through a field, beyond which was a fence and a thick wood. In the skirts of this wood next to the field, the first American line was drawn up, consisting of the North Carolina militia.... The front line only was in sight.... The whole moved on toward the North Carolinians, who waited the attack, until the enemy got within 140 yards, when part of them fired once, while a great number ran away without firing or being fired upon. All the exertions of their officers to rally them were ineffectual...and let in the enemy upon the second line composed of the Virginia militia under Stevens.⁸

As Henry Lee wrote:

When the enemy came within long shot, the American line, by order, began to fire. Undismayed, the British continued to advance; and having reached a proper distance, discharged their pieces and rent the air with shouts. To our infinite distress and mortification, the North Carolina militia took to flight, a few only of Eaton's brigade excepted, who clung to the militia under Campbell; which, with the Legion, manfully maintained their ground.⁹

Once the rush was on there was little that Generals Butler and Eaton could do to halt the disintegration of the North Carolina militia line even when "assisted by Colonel Davie, commissary general" and other

8. Gordon, Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 174.

9. Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 277-78.

In another context Lee phrased it thus:

"The front line of Greene, although advantageously posted and gallantly flanked, being already intimidated, were struck with a panic at the first fire, and deaf to the exhortations of their officer, insensible to the example of the firm and gallant parties under Washington and Lee, threw down their loaded arms, and fled precipitately, scudding round the extremities, or bursting through the intervals of the second line; upon which the enemy fell exulting in their prowess, and sure of victory." (Campaigns of 1781, p. 171.)

officers including Henry Lee. However, the picture was not quite so bleak as Lee and other writers who followed his lead have painted. It is clear now that there was a telling fire into the oncoming British line from at least parts of the line and some did stand their ground.¹⁰ Even the enemy admitted this and Sir Thomas Saumarez was not the only witness.

There was, too, the account of Sergeant Roger Lamb,¹¹ also with the British 23rd that day, who related: "After the brigade formed across the open ground, the colonell Webster rode on to the front, and gave the word 'Charge'. Instantly the move was made, in excellent order, in a smart run, with arms charged: when arrived within forty yards of the enemy's line, it was perceived that their whole force had their arms presented, and resting on a rail fence, the common partitions in America. They were taking aim with the nicest precision." For the 23rd Regiment it was a critical moment as Lamb detailed:

Colonel Webster rode forward in the front of the 23d regiment, and said with more than even his usual commanding voice (which was well known to his Brigade,) 'Come on, my brave Fuzileers.' This operated like an inspiring voice, they rushed forward amidst the enemy's fire; dreadful was the havoc on both sides.

"Amazing scene!

What showers of mortal hail! What flaky fires!"

At last the Americans gave way, and the brigade advanced, to the attack of their second line.

This was north of the road and the 23d faced the militia brigade of General Eaton. There is report, too, from south of the road where the 71st Highland Regiment was one of the units moving across an open field against the Butler Brigade of North Carolinians. One company in the

10. A more recent considered conclusion by a longtime student of the battle is that "Although earning Greene's scorn for their flight, the militia had inflicted damage that day prior to their withdrawal." (Hugh F. Rankin, The American Revolution, p. 285.)

11. Lamb, Occurrences During the Late American War, p. 361.

71st was commanded by Capt. Dugald Stuart who in later recollection commented: "In the advance we received a very deadly fire, from the Irish North Carolina Scotch-Irish line of the American army, composed of their marksmen lying on the ground behind a rail fence. One half of the Highlanders dropped on that spot, there ought to be a pretty large tumulus where our men were buried."¹²

Then there were the observations of Samuel Houston, who was a volunteer in General Stevens command and seemingly observant, certainly in his part of the field:

The Virginia line was in the forest, the Carolina militia partly in the forest and partly on the skirt of the forest and partly behind the fence enclosing the open space, across which the British force was advancing with extended front.

According to orders, the Carolina line, when the enemy was very near, gave their fire, which on the left of the British line was deadly, and having repeated it, retreated. Some remained to give a third fire and some made such haste in retreat as to bring reproach upon themselves as deficient in bravery, while their neighbors behaved like heroes.¹³

As William Stedman reviewed the situation he concluded that: "The resistance of the enemy was in proportion to the excellent advantages they possessed; nor did they yield but with reluctance. Even the militia, encouraged by their position, fought with bravery, and greatly weakened the British line before it reached the continentals."¹⁴ From the context it is clear that Stedman included North Carolina as well as Virginia militia.

12. Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., pp. 133-34. Evidently he was correct about the "tumulus" which, by report, was found a century later through excavation. (See Hatch, Guilford Courthouse and its Environs, Ch. IX, Sect. 4.)

13. Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., p. 149; Schenck, North Carolina 1780-81, p. 348.

14. The American War, 2, 382.

There were a number of American, especially local area, recollections (besides that of Houston) that attest to some spirit and fight in the North Carolina line, such as that of William Montgomery of Guilford County who fought as one of Capt. Arthur Forbis's little company of 25 in Butler's brigade line. In his later years, "when - describing the scene," he "usually illustrated it by saying that, after they delivered their first fire, which was a deliberate one, with their rifles, the part of the British line at which they aimed, looked like the scattering stalks in a wheatfield when the harvestman has passed over with his cradle."¹⁵ It almost reads as if the Forbis company was opposite that of Captain Stuart. They, at least generally, are known to have been in the same part of the line.

There is, too, the interesting detail later reported by Col. James Martin in a petition he penned: "I was posted on the front line with a company commanded by Captain Forbis, a brave, undaunted fellow. We were posted behind a fence, and I told the men to set down until the British, who were advancing, came near enough to shoot." When they were within a hundred yards Martin spotted "a British officer with a drawn sword who was driving up his men." He asked Forbis if "he could take him down" and he replied that he could for "he had a good rifle." And when he had come within fifty yards he took "A Captain of the British army" down. At this point Martin had to leave the field. On orders from Greene through an aide-de-camp, Martin, who did not have "a complete regiment in command," was directed "to go with Major Hunter to the court-house, and in case of defeat to rally the men" which he would do.¹⁶

15. Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd Ser., pp. 134-35.

Forbis, a militia captain from the Alamance congregation, was a ruling elder in that body. "It is certain that the company of Captain Forbis, with many others, fired twice, and he and some of his men did not give way until the British were within a few steps. He and two of his neighbors were then wounded. Thomas Wiley and William Paisley, father of the Rev. Samuel Paisley, who is yet living." (*Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.)

16. Given in Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 351-2. See, also, State Records of North Carolina, XXII, 148.

In the action that followed sheer numbers forced Forbis into retreat, he himself taking balls in his neck and leg. He fell wounded and lay ignored by friend and enemy in the cold and rain for the next 30 hours. Eventually he was found, still alive, but despite the best efforts of Dr. David Caldwell he died within a few days and was buried in the church-yard at Alamance. (William G. Gray, "The Monuments at Guilford Courthouse

There is a report, too, in more general terms written the day after the battle by Charles Magill to Jefferson that "Immediately on the display of their the British Column an Attack was made on our Front Line composed entirely by Militia, who returned their fire."¹⁷

But in spite of it all, the North Carolina militia, center of the first American line, did collapse and open the way to Greene's second line.¹⁸ And General Greene was badly disappointed that these troops did not hold longer, deliver more fire, and inflict greater damage from their protected position behind the fences, which he deemed a good one. At least initially he thought that it may have cost him the victory on the field. On March 18 he wrote Governor Abner Nash of North Carolina from his "Camp near the Iron Works" quite plainly that "We ought to have had . victory and had your Militia stood by their officers it was certain."¹⁹

There was a little more detail in Greene's day-after-the-battle letter to Governor Jefferson of Virginia: "The Carolina Brigades of Militia neglected to take advantage of their position but fled, (at least the greater part of them, without giving more than one fire) and let the Enemey in upon the second Line."²⁰ In a letter to Washington on the 18th

National Military Park," a typewritten undated National Park Service report available prior to November 1967. Also, see North Carolina Biographical Sketches of Soldiers and Patriots in the Battle of Guilford Courthouse March 15, 1781 (Greensboro, 1958-1963), 6, 102, and 1, 73.)

17. The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 152.

18. It does not appear that David Ramsay's explanation of the flight could in any case explain but that in a small segment of the line. The retreat was occasioned, he related, "from the misconduct of a colonel, who, on the advance of the enemy, called out to an officer at some distance, that 'he would be surrounded.' The alarm was sufficient, without inquiring into the probability of what had been injudiciously suggested, the militia precipitately quitted the field." (The History of The American Revolution, p. 585.)

19. Transcript in the files of Guilford Courthouse NMP of original letter in the William L. Clements Library.

Greene wrote Morgan on the 20th in the same vein: "had the North Carolina militia done their duty, victory would have been certain and early." (Graham, Daniel Morgan, p. 372.)

20. The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 156.

he wrote that "None fired more than twice, and near half not at all."²¹

As, or even before, the British moved through the first militia line they sensed trouble on both their flanks. Here the American "corps of observation" extended beyond them perhaps 150 yards on each end, and angled forward. For the most part protected by the woods, they were not immediately visible to the enemy. As they began to pour in enfilading fire, however, their presence was felt. The British answered by changing the front of the units on their extreme left and right, stretching their line, and closing the resulting gaps with their reserves until all available infantry was in the line. By the time that this was effective all the fighting had reached and was taking place in the woods.²²

On the far right the Bose Regiment felt the heavy and galling fire of Campbell's riflemen operating from behind trees and other cover as available. Beyond them were the infantrymen of Lee's Legion equally as adept in the situation. Here on the right end of the line Norton's first battalion of the Guards was placed to counter them. As Cornwallis summarized, "Major-general Leslie, after being obliged, by the extend of the enemy's line" brought "up the 1st battalion of guards to the right of the regiment of Bose." Then all seemed to go well, as he commented that he "soon defeated every thing before him." But this was a delusion, as Campbell and the infantry simply gave ground only to rebound later.

Initially at the left end of the British line, which was overlapped by Lynch's riflemen and the persistent Delaware continentals of Kirkwood, the going was even tougher. Webster was soon joined, as he plunged into the woods on his extreme left, by the reserve yagers and light infantry of the Guards. Again as Cornwallis phrased it: "When finding that the left of the 33rd was exposed to a heavy fire from the right wing of the enemy, he changed his front to the left, and being supported by the

21. Quoted in G. W. Greene's Life of Nathanael Greene, 3, 198.

Greene phrased it a little differently in his letter of March 16 to the President of Congress. "The whole [British force] moved through the old fields to attack the North Carolina Brigades, who waited the attack until the enemy got within 140 yards, when a part of them began to fire, but a considerable part left the ground without firing at all. The general and field officers did all they could to induce the men to stand their ground, but neither the advantages of the position nor any other consideration could induce them to stay." (Given in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 498.)

22. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 313-14. See also Stedman, History of the American War, 2, 337, and "Tarleton Map" (Illustration No. 4).

yagers and the light infantry of the guards, attacked and routed it." Here again it was not a rout as the riflemen and Delawares simply dropped back under cover of Washington's cavalry and remained in the fight.

As Webster inclined to the left (or north) with his 33rd he pulled the 23rd with him to prevent a gap, though the 23rd remained headed east toward the courthouse. This did create an opening or gap between the right of the 23rd and the New Garden Road. This was plugged by the "the grenadiers and 2d battalion of the guards" under O'Hara, the last of Cornwallis's reserves. Or, as the British commander related, O'Hara moved "forward to occupy the ground left vacant by the movement of Lieutenant-colonel Webster." At this junction Cornwallis could observe: "All the infantry being now in the line, Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton had directions to keep his cavalry compact and not to charge without positive orders, except to protect any corps from the evident danger of being defeated."

In brief capsule, though with evident oversimplification, Tarleton described the dissolution of the American first line in this manner:

The British troops were no sooner formed than they marched forward with steadiness and composure: The order and coolness of that part of Webster's brigade which advanced across the open ground, exposed to the enemy's fire cannot be sufficiently extolled: The extremities were no less gallant but were more protected in the woods in which they moved. The militia allowed the front line to approach within one hundred and fifty yards before they gave their fire: The front line continued to move on: The Americans sent back their cannon, and part of them repeated their fire: The Kings troops threw in their fire, and charged rapidly with their bayonets: The shock was not waited for by the militia, who retreated behind the second line.²³

23. Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 280.

CHAPTER VI

The Second Line Holds for a Time

Nathanael Greene concisely described the attack on his second line after the North Carolina militia had opened the gate and after the flanks had forced the British to lengthen the line and commit all their reserves. He wrote that "the enemy advanced in three columns; the Hessians on the their right, the guards in the center and Lieutenant-colonel Webster on the left."¹ This line, he observed, "was composed of Virginians under the command of Generals Stevens and Lawson. Here they the British were met with a warm reception and were much gauled by an incessant fire which lasted for a considerable length of time. Superior discipline at length prevailed, and the Militia were drove back upon the Continental Troops which made the Action general."²

Greene's brief description only suggests the intensity of the action in the woods fighting before and along this line. An early British account obviously based on contemporary sources makes this quite clear:³

the Virginia militia, in the second line were by no means influenced by their the North Carolina militia example; they, on the contrary stood their ground for a considerable time, and fought with great resolution.... It was indeed an action of almost infinite diversity. The excessive thickness of the woods, had rendered the bayonet in a great measure useless;⁴ had enabled the enemy, however, broken to rally, to fight in detachment, and to make repeated and obstinate stands; it had necessarily and entirely broken

1. Dawson concluded later that "The second line opened its files and allowed the fugitives to pass through; while in concert with the flanking parties which supported the Carolina militia, it opened a destructive fire, and severely handled the enemy as he approached." (Battles of the United States, 1, 666.)

2. Letters of March 16 in Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 156, and Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 324.

3. Annual Register for 1781, p. 67.

4. Tarleton amplifies this further: "The thickness of the woods where these conflicts happened prevented the cavalry making a charge upon the Americans on the retreat to the continentals, and impeded the British

the order of battle; and separated and disjoined the British corps, who could know no more of each other, than what they gathered from the greatness, the continuance, or the course of the firing, in different quarters. Thus the battle degenerated into a number of irregular, but hard fought and bloody skirmishes.

In the case of the 23rd Regiment, Sir Thomas Saumarez recounted that opposite his position the second American line "was formed behind brushwood. Not being able to attack in front, the Fusiliers were obliged to take the ground to their left to get clear of the brushwood. They then attacked the enemy with the bayonet in so cool and deliberate a manner as to throw the Americans into the greatest confusion and disperse them."⁵ This and other delays broke the alignment and caused the 23rd to fall behind the 33rd on its left and the Guards on their right.

South of the road the 71st found the going tough as they struck into the Stevens brigade almost alone. When Leslie's right became deeply involved with Campbell and Lee and fell behind he elected to move east toward the courthouse with his 71st.⁶ As Cornwallis related: "The 71st regiment and grenadiers, and 2d battalion of the guards Just north of the road, not knowing what was passing on their right, and hearing the fire advance on the left Likely Webster's corps, continued to move forward, the artillery keeping pace with them on the road, followed by the cavalry."⁷

Even so the 71st did fall behind in the line due to the stubborn militia, rough terrain, and possibly to some hesitancy about its now-unprotected right flank.⁸ As Cornwallis detailed: "The 2d battalion of guards first gained the clear ground near Guilford court-house, and

moving forward in a well connected line. Some corps meeting with less opposition and embarrassment than others, arrived sooner in the presence of the continentals, who received them with resolution and firmness." (Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 281.)

5. Broughton-Mainwaring, Royal Welch Fusiliers, p. 101.

6. Henry Lee interpreted it thus: "General Leslie, turning the regiment of Bose, with the battalion of guards, upon Lee, pressed forward himself with the seventy-first to cover the right of Webster, now keenly engaged with the Virginia militia." (Memoirs of the War, p. 278.)

7. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 314.

8. Carrington, Battles of the Revolution, p. 560.

found a corps of continental infantry, much superior in number, formed in the open field on the left of the road."⁹ This was after the premature emergence of Webster farther north and well before the 71st broke through on the right and the 23rd on the left of the road.

It was stubborn fighting and the Virginians generally gave a good account of themselves. Stedman recorded that: "The Virginia militia, who composed the second American line, did not quit the ground, it is said, until their commander, seeing them no longer able to withstand attack of regular troops, and ready to be overpowered, gave orders for a retreat."¹⁰ William Gilmore Simms, writing in 1859, described it succinctly: "Their fire was delivered with equal coolness and precision. Armed numerously, with the rifle, no single shot was expended idly, but each bullet had its mission for a special mark. Wide gaps were soon opened in the British files by a fire so destructive...."¹¹

These general accounts of the fighting give the broad lines of the action; however, they only suggest the individual and intense personal nature of the fighting here. This comes best from the accounts of participants such as those of Sergeant Lamb, St. George Tucker, and Samuel Houston.

9. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 314.

10. The American War, 2, 382.

Henry Lee waxed eloquent in his description of it: "But the Virginians, not dismayed, but indignant stood firm against the wave of flight [by the North Carolinians] and battle that rolled impetuously toward them; and the action here became close and animated. Nothing could surpass the ardour of the British; the resistance of the Virginians was rude and resolute.... They received that they might inflict wounds; and being better marksmen than soldiers, their fire, though not regular, was fierce and fatal." (Campaigns of 1781, pp. 171-72.) His commendation went to both "Stevens and Lawson, with their faithful brigades." (Memoirs of the War, p. 278.)

11. The Life of Nathanael Greene (New York), p. 190.

It is said that "The Virginia militia and volunteers, that maintained their ground so bravely, and received so much applause for their soldier like conduct, were from Augusta and Rockbridge counties, and almost to a man the descendants of Scotch-Irish." (Foote, Sketches of North Carolina, p. 280.)

As Lamb¹² moved with his regiment to advance and attack the second American line he recalled, "Here the conflict became still more fierce." At one point: "I observed an American officer attempting to fly. I immediately darted after him, but he perceiving my intention to capture him, fled with the utmost speed. I pursued, and was gaining on him, when, hearing a confused noise on my left, I observed several bodies of Americans drawn up within the distance of a few yards." He continued: "Seeing one of the guards among the slain, where I stood, I stopped and replenished my own pouch with the cartridges that remained in his; during the time I was thus employed, several shots were fired at me; but not one took effect. Glancing my eye the other way, I saw a company of the guards advancing to attack these parties. It was impossible to join this company as several of the American parties lay between me and it." Evidently Lamb was detached from his regiment at this time. In the woods fighting there was a good deal of disorganization, it being impossible to keep a solid line formation.

While deciding on his next move, Lamb "saw lord Cornwallis riding across the clear ground. His lordship was mounted on a dragoon's horse (his own having been shot); the saddle-bags were under the creature's belly, which much retarded his progress, owing to the vast quantity of underwood that was spread over the ground; his lordship was evidently unconscious of his danger." Whereupon Lamb led the horse and the general until they were clear of immediate danger and he was back with his 23rd.¹³ Cornwallis had crossed over into this area following his personal evaluation of the situation and his personal encouragement to the troops on his right flank where he had first gone.

12. Lamb, Occurrences During the Late American War, pp. 361-62.

For his principal battle narrative Lamb depended on Stedman, noting that "The details are so accurately laid down by Stedman, who had every opportunity of ascertaining even the minutest circumstance, that it may be better to quote his account of it, than by aiming at originality." But he added "some circumstances unnoticed by any historian, from his own personal observation." It is from this area that the material here is drawn. (*Ibid.*, pp. 349, 361.)

13. "I immediately laid hold of the bridle of his horse, and turned his head. I then mentioned to him, that if his lordship had pursued the same direction, he would in a few moments have been surrounded by the enemy, and perhaps, cut to pieces or captured. I continued to run along side of the horse, keeping the bridle in my hand, until his lordship, gained the 23rd regiment, which at that time was drawn up in the skirt of the woods."

In this same general area of action north of the road a Virginia officer, St. George Tucker, saw and recorded the action much in the manner of Sergeant Lamb, thus further documenting the confusion of the woods fighting along the second line.¹⁴ Tucker was frank to admit that "during the whole of the battle I knew nothing of what passed in any quarter than on the ground where our regiment was engaged." As the battle progressed and the British moved toward them, orders came for his regiment and that to the left of him "to advance and annoy the enemy's left flank. "While we were advancing to execute this order, the British had advanced" and had turned the flank of a regiment on Tucker's left and the enemy were discovered "in our rear." This threw the militia here into confusion and they "dispersed like a flock of sheep frightened by dogs," a situation that Tucker deplored very much.¹⁵ With much exertion Tucker and a fellow officer "rallied about sixty or seventy of our men, and brought them to charge." Then with "the few men which we had collected we at several times sustained an irregular kind of skirmishing with the British, and were once successful enough to drive a party for a very small distance."

Tucker wrote further: "On the ground we passed over I think, I saw about eight or ten men killed and wounded. During the battle I was forced to ride over a British officer lying at the foot of a tree. One of our soldiers gave him a dram as he was expiring and bade him die like a brave man."

Though it would not take him out of action, but would trouble him later, Tucker took a leg wound as a "bayonet penetrated about an inch and a half between the bones in" his leg. This was while he was attempting to rally a party of regular troops and it came "from a soldier, who either from design or accident held his bayonet in such a direction that I could not possibly avoid it as I rode up to stop him from running away." Shortly after this "our militia joined the Virginia regulars under Col. Campbell, and sustained a good smart fire for some minutes. We were soon ordered to retire."¹⁶

14. "The Southern Campaign: 1781," Mag. of Am. History, 7, 40-42.

Because of his vivid detail, it is good that Tucker had found some writing ink. In a letter written to his wife on March 7 he had noted: "I have just spilt all my ink. God knows when you will get another letter from me." (*Ibid.*, p. 38.)

15. The Tucker account is given in more detail in Appendix C, "In One Sector with the Virginia Militia."

16. He does not identify this Colonel Campbell. It could hardly have been Col. William Campbell who was now quite detached and in another part of the field, and in command of irregulars.

South of the road the Virginia militia fought equally as hard in the sector held by Stevens brigade. One of the participants here in the stubborn fight on the left of the second line penned an account of it and, later, often talked of the battle among his friends. He was twenty-three-year-old Samuel Houston.¹⁷ He is reported to have "discharged his rifle fourteen times" that afternoon and in the morning prior to the battle to have had "an opportunity for private prayer in an old tree top, and where he with unusual freedom committed himself to the wise and protecting providence of God."¹⁸

As the English had approached the battlefield, he reported, "we immediately fell into our ranks, and our brigades marched out" and took position. This was on the far left of the American second line. Houston continued:

Col. McDowell's battalion of Gen. Stephen's brigade was ordered on the left wing. When we marched near the ground: we charged our guns. Presently our brigade major came, ordering [us] to take trees as we pleased. The men run to choose their trees, but with difficulty, many crowding to one, and some far behind others. But we moved by order of our officers, and stood in suspense.¹⁹ Presently the Augusta men, and some of Col. Campbell's fell in at right angles on us...

and the action became hot and furious. The "Augusta" and "Campbells" men were evidently some units falling back the 300 yards from the first line. However, the connection with this second line would be slight and only

17. Houston returned home very soon after the battle of Guilford and became a minister. He served for a long time as pastor of the Highbridge Congregation in Rockbridge County, Virginia.

18. Houston "Journal" (Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd Ser., pp. 141-43, 146-48).

19. Houston described the opening action of the battle, from which he was rather far removed, in these words: "Standing in readiness, we heard the pickets fire; shortly the English fired a cannon, which was answered, and so on alternately, till the small armed troops came nigh, and then close firing began near the centre but rather towards the right, and soon spread along the line. Our brigade-major, Mr. Williams, fled. Presently came two men to us and informed us the British fled. However, Soon the enemy appeared to us."

momentary as the action in this quarter was moving southward where the Hessian regiment was turning it. Houston and others now joining with Campbell thus broke off from the far left end of the Virginia line to become participants in this "separate engagement." Now as Houston related: "We fired on their flank, and that brought down many of them; at which time Captain Telford was killed. We pursued them about forty poles to the top of a hill, when they stood, and we retreated from them back to where we formed."

The action to the south raged on: "the first battalion of guards, and the regiment of Bose, after they imagined that they had nearly carried everything before them, were warmly engaged."²⁰ Perhaps the most detailed account of this prolonged and almost constant action comes from Charles Stedman,²¹ drawing heavily on the reports of Cornwallis, Tarleton and others. He wrote of

the excessive thickness of the woods, which rendered their /the British/ bayonets of little use. The broken corps of the enemy were thereby encouraged to make frequent stands, and to throw in an irregular fire;²² so that this part of the British line was at times warmly engaged in front flank and rear, with some of the enemy that had been routed in the first attack, and with part of the extremity of their left wing, which, by the closeness of the woods, had been passed unseen.

20. Annual Register for 1781, p. 68.

21. The American War, 2, 379 ff.

22. Cornwallis admitted that "the frequent stands, with an irregular fire" "occasioned some loss, and to several corps great delay, particularly on our right" (Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 314).

It was to the right, where progress was slow, although the battle had already moved a quarter mile, that Cornwallis had gone for a firsthand view and to encourage the troops here. It was in this sector that he had his first mount killed under him. He was soon astride a dragoon's mount and off to another sector, as has been noted. (Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 128; Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 361-62.)

Cornwallis would have at least a second mount shot before the battle subsided. It was reported that because of the intense action and his personal involvement "It was no small wonder, that two horses were shot under him." (Annual Register for 1781, p. 69.)

At one period of the action the first battalion of the guards was completely broken. It had suffered greatly in ascending a woody height to attack the second line of the Americans, strongly posted on the top of it, who availing themselves of the advantages of their situation, retired, as soon as they had discharged their pieces, behind the brow of the hill, which protected them from the shot of the guards, and returned, as soon as they had loaded, and were again in readiness to fire. Notwithstanding the disadvantages under which the attack was made, the guards reached the summit of the eminence and put this part of the American line to flight: But no sooner was it done, than another line of the Americans presented itself to view, extending far beyond the right of the guards, and inclining towards their flank, so as almost to encompass them.²³ The ranks of the guards had been thinned in ascending the height, and a number of the officers had fallen: Captain Maitland, who at this time received a wound, retired to the rear, having had his wound dressed, returned immediately to join the battalion of guards to which he belonged. Some of the men, too, from superior exertions, had reached the summit of the eminence sooner than others; so the battalion was not up at regular order when it received the fire of the third American line. The enemy's fire being repeated and continued, and from the great extent of their line, being poured in not only on the front but flank of the battalion, completed its confusion and disorder, and, notwithstanding every exertion made by the remaining officers, it was at last entirely broken. Fortunately, at this time, the Hessian

23. According to Henry Lee the battle on the left "had raged without intermission." Here he observed without modesty that "the valour of the legion infantry, and the dangerous courage of Campbell and his riflemen" continued to engage the British right wing, the Bose Regiment and the Guard's first battalion. When the Guards under Norton were broken the regiment of Bose relieved them. When they failed to quiet the Americans the Guards came back into the action. "These alterations brought the combatants almost at right angles to their first formation." At length the Germans and the riflemen, the Guards and the Legion infantry were respectively opposed. (Campaigns of 1781, pp. 176-77.)

regiment of Bose, commanded by lieutenant-colonel de Buij, which had hitherto suffered but little was advancing in firm and compact order on the left of the guards, to attack the enemy. Lieutenant-colonel Norton thought the fortunate arrival of the regiment of Bose presented a favourable opportunity for forming again his battalion, and requested the Hessian lieutenant-colonel to wheel his regiment to the right,²⁴ and cover the guards whilst their officers endeavoured to rally them. The request was immediately and most gallantly complied with; and, under the cover of the fire of the Hessians, the execution of lieutenant-colonel Norton, and his few remaining officers, were at last successful in restoring order. The battalion, being again formed, instantly moved forward to join the Hessians: The attack was renewed, and the enemy were defeated. But here the labors of this part of the line did not cease. No sooner had the guards and Hessians defeated the enemy in front, than they found it necessary to return and attack another body of them that had appeared in the rear; and in this manner they were obliged to traverse the same ground in various directions.

And so it continued in this quarter for quite some time.

While the left flanking force of Lee and Campbell, with some militia groups, became isolated in the particular separate action to the south (as the British drove into the second American line), that on the right performed according to plan. Though Webster hit hard at Lynch's riflemen and the Delawares backed by William Washington's cavalry, they gave ground but grudgingly to fall back and fight for a time on the second line. Then in turn they dropped back evenly to the support of the third American line.²⁵ It was William Seymour, fighting all the way in this corps, who

24. Likely this was the time Samuel Houston remembered after the men with him had twice pursued some of the Guards "forty poles, to the top of a hill" where they stood and each time forced the Americans back to their "first ground." Now, he summarized, "we were deceived by a reinforcement of Hessians, whom we took for our own, and cried to them to see if they were our friends, and shouted aloud Liberty! Liberty! and advanced up, till they let off some guns; then we fired sharply on them and made them retreat a little." (Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., pp. 141 ff.)

25. Dawson, Battles of the United States, 1, 667.

observed that "our riflemen and musketry behaved with great bravery, killing and wounding great numbers of the enemy."²⁶ There were fewer chroniclers of the action here but the implication is that there was a hard contest most of the way.

Stedman relates that it was only "after two severe struggles" that Webster "gained the right of the continentals" where he prematurely carried the attack alone. "But, the superiority of their the Continentals numbers, and the weight of their fire, obliged him, separated as he was from the rest of the British line, to re-cross a ravine, and occupy an advantageous position on the opposite bank, until he could hear of the progress of the King's troops on the right."²⁷

Webster with his 33rd and its light infantry and yager support had kept pressing the Delaware's and Lynch's riflemen as they withdrew rather evenly toward places in support of the third line. This brought Webster out into the north end of the old fields in front of the continental line only a part of which was in the open and visible, vision being obscured by weeds, bushes, and likely scrubby pines. He wanted to keep momentum though he did not know the whereabouts of other British units. He forged ahead down into the little vale that broke the topography here and up the other side. As Henry Lee put it, "with more ardour than prudence, [he] fell again upon Lynch and Kirkwood, and encountered the right of Williams's brigade. His left was speedily routed by the Delawares and Virginians Hawes regiment, his right, opposed by the first Maryland regiment, under Colonel Gunby, and he was forced to retire to a neighboring height."²⁸

26. "A Journal of the Southern Expedition" Hist. Soc. of Delaware, 2 (Paper XV), 20.

27. The American War, 2, 377.

28. Campaigns of 1781, p. 173.

Henry B. Dawson summarizes it simply: "The attack, led by so experienced and brave an officer, would not be otherwise than well constructed, yet the cool determination of the Continentals, and the want of support--the remainder of the line being yet in his rear--compelled the assailants to fall back, and find safety by recrossing a ravine in his rear." (Battles of the United States, 1, 667.)

The Americans, especially the 1st Maryland regiment, had waited until the advancing British were within a close, convenient range and then let fly a withering fire, a fire that staggered the oncoming enemy. Webster, stunned, withdrew, being pursued for a time with the bayonet by the Marylanders. He did not stop until he had recrossed the ravine and ascended its opposite slope, halting in the edge of the woods to count losses, regroup, and await developments. It was in this charge presumably that Webster received a dangerous knee wound, from which he would not recover.²⁹ The 1st Maryland began its return to its position in the line. As Lieutenant Colonel Howard of the Maryland regiment recounted:

When Webster advanced upon our third line, his left and centre engaged, and were worsted by Kirkwood and Lynch, while his right attacked the first Maryland regiment. He did not press us hard; nor did we defeat or charge upon him. We left him and charged the second battalion of guards, which unperceived, got in our rear.³⁰

In speculating on this situation Caruthers surmised that "Had either of the cavalry corps been convenient at the moment of Webster's hasty withdrawal the battle might have been decided, for the 33rd regiment and the two light companies which attended it must have surrendered." Others have speculated along the same line.³¹ But as the 2nd battalion of Guards were even then on the move it may have been foolhardy for Greene to have sent his best troops into this sector. The events of the next half hour would prove his wisdom. Besides, in view of Howard's comments,

29. It is possible, however, that his grievous wound came when he next assaulted the continentals. As Foote related: "Webster led his regiment, as boldly as if his life was charmed against powder and lead, on to attack the first Maryland regiment, renowned for their conduct at Cowpens. The gallant colonel's regiment recoiled at the first deadly fire, and gave way before the advance of the Marylanders. Grievously wounded, Webster rallied his own men on the skirts of the wood...and in a little time was ready to re-enter the battle." (Sketches of North Carolina, p. 277.)

30. Quoted in Lee, Campaigns of 1781, p. 183n.

31. Perhaps none has expressed it better than William Johnson: "Had either corps of cavalry been present at this time, the battle would probably have terminated here, for the 33rd regiment, and the two light companies attending it, could not have numbered less than 400 men,

the Webster rout seems not to have been so complete as some have assumed.³² It was, moreover, not in Greene's plans to hazard all his army on a single attack. Morgan at Cowpens gambled with a detachment, but Greene headed the only American army in the south. He could not recklessly endanger it.

The second line fought strongly, as is already evident, delaying the British advance and exacting a significant toll before being pushed back. The numbers of killed, wounded and missing of the 71st and 23rd regiments clearly show this. The casualties these two units took that day were essentially all from the two militia lines.³³

The 23rd pushed through the area of Eaton's North Carolinians and then hit Lawson's brigade in the second line, suffering 68 in killed, wounded and missing out of a strength of 238. At the same time the 71st received 63 casualties (out of its 244 men) as it forced the brigade of Butler and hit the Virginians of Stevens. At the same time the Hessian regiment had 80 casualties out of 321 to the south and Webster lost 74 of his 234. In the latter instance, however, it is not known what percentage of these were in the actions against the American third line.

considerably above the strength of the Maryland regiment; and the loss of so large a portion of his army, at this period, must have compelled the British commander to sound a retreat." (Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 10. See also G. W. Greene, Life of Nathanael Greene, 3, 200.)

32. As in the case of Christopher L. Ward, The Delaware Continentals, 1776-1783 (Wilmington, Delaware, 1941), pp. 415-16; Simms, Nathanael Greene, p. 191; Alden, The American Revolution, p. 464.

The Colonels Dupuy seem harshly critical and most unfair to Greene in writing of this: "At this point, a George Washington, a Daniel Morgan, or a Benedict Arnold would have counter attacked with his entire command. The British had been stopped completely on the American left, and had been thrown into confusion on their right. Had Greene seized this moment in the way Morgan did at Cowpens, a complete victory would have been almost certain. Tarleton and other British officers were convinced that the battle was already lost." (R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Compact History of the Revolutionary War (New York, c. 1963-3rd edition, 1968), p. 400.

33. From Cornwallis's field returns and battle losses of the day; see Appendix A.

Neither can it be determined how many of the Guards' second battalion casualties came from the drive through these militia lines.³⁴

Both Virginia brigades were tough that day. The fact that the 23rd and 71st regiments emerged in the open from the fray (the one north and the other south of the Salisbury Road) at about the same time late in the action indicates that they found comparable resistance. It was the 2d battalion of Guards that seemed to have, after Webster, the most success in breaking it. At least they (minus the grenadiers who were still held back) first broke through the woods to the cleared area in front of the waiting American continentals. This indicates that the left end of Lawson's brigade gave way first. Also, it would argue against any formal pivoting or wheeling of Lawson's brigade as some have assumed.³⁵ Rather the indications are that the militia melted away to the rear--right, left, and center. It is possible that some, moving before the Guards, exited across the road and moved to cover behind Stevens's brigade, which by general agreement was the last to break contact and retreat.

As the action about him reached its hottest, Stevens himself took a ball in the thigh that forced him to withdraw.³⁶ His departure precipitated the retreat of most of his brigade. His troops then moved around toward the courthouse, keeping to the woods bordering the open ground. It is said that a large group on reaching the courthouse across

34. Neither do the available statistical breakdowns tell how many casualties the 1st Battalion of Guards absorbed in the action to the south. Altogether the Guards took 216 casualties from their strength of 481.

35. See Johnson, Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 9 ff; Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 361.

Caruthers also seems to be at odds with the facts in the actually simple moves though his presentation is interesting in other respects: "The brigade of Stephens being mostly volunteers, and many of their officers and men having been in battle before, maintained their ground with considerable firmness, and, for some time, the conflict was fierce and bloody. Lawson's brigade being new militia, and mostly drafted for the occasion first yielded, wheeling around behind Stephens brigade, and then retreated, with precipitancy and confusion." Aside from the wheeling, there is also no reason to assume that Colonel Webster "followed the Virginia militia to the Salisbury road." (Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser. pp. 114-15.)

36. Henry Lee had high praise for Stevens: "he maintained the fight with vigour and vivacity. At length, in a furious charge by the enemy, a ball pierced his thigh, and this gallant officer, no longer able

Hunting Creek stood for a time and watched the intense fighting that now developed along the third line.³⁷

Col. James Martin, who was pulled back from the first line early in the fighting to establish, with Major Hunter, a militia rally point at the courthouse (as previously noted), now did so. They collected about 500 and were marching them to the battleground when, Martin stated, "I met General Stevens, of the Virginia corps, retreating. I asked him if the retreat was of General Greene's orders. He said it was. I then retreated with him and ordered the men to repair to the Troublesome Iron Works to outfit, as he had ordered me which we obeyed."³⁸ Stevens was quite pleased with the performance of his command, writing that "The brigade behaved with the greatest bravery, and stood till I ordered their retreat."³⁹

Certainly Greene was pleased with the performance of his second line. "It would," he wrote, "be ungenerous not to say that the conduct of the Virginia Militia deserves my warmest approbation. General Stevens and Lawson with all the Officers under them did themselves great honor."⁴⁰ Greene repeated the same sentiments to the President of the Continental Congress, writing that Stevens and Lawson and the officers and troops of their brigades "were more successful in their executions. The Virginia militia gave the enemy a warm reception and kept up a heavy fire for a long time....[also he added] The corps of observations under Washington and Lee did great execution [at this and other times]."⁴¹ It is reported that "Major [Alexander] Stuart said, that afterwards Greene told him, that there was a turn in the battle in which, if he could have reckoned

to stand foremost in danger, ordered a retreat; leaving his adversaries too much weakened by the conflict to exult in their success. As the Virginians retired in squads, the British, in detachments, moved against the third line...." (Campaigns of 1781, p. 173.)

37. Caruthers wrote that the "brigade of Stephens" quickly followed the departure of Lawson's. They "both retreated with all the speed they could, and by making a circuit through the fields and woods entered the village on the south side, where they became spectators of the remaining acts in the scene." (Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 114.)

38. Given in Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 351-52.

39. From a letter quoted in Lee, Campaigns of 1781, pp. 182-83.

40. In his letter of March 16 to Jefferson, Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 156.

41. In Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 498.

upon the firm stand of the left wing of Virginia militia, he could have annihilated the army of Cornwallis. He knew they were good for a short fight, but was not prepared to see them stand it out as regulars."⁴²

At this point Greene had reason to view things favorably though he did not have all of the facts, especially in regard to the separate action to the south, or the effectiveness of the actions in the woods. The long fight along the second line meant punishment for the British and their line was now broken into segments. Greene's artillery was in position with good range. His right flank corps had done its job with the Delawares, some of Lynch's unit, and Washington's cavalry now in support of the continentals. His continentals were in good shape and fresh. Webster's corps had assaulted the third line only to be thrown back emphatically. But things could change quickly and they did.⁴³ It began, in the words of Stedman paraphrasing Cornwallis, when the British center broke through: "and the second battalion of guards, commanded by the honorable lieutenant-colonel Stuart, was the first that reached the open ground at Guilford Court-house."⁴⁴

42. Given in Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., p. 147.

Samuel Houston related that Major Stuart's horse was shot as the action to the south ended in precipitate retreat, and he was seized and surrendered. "His captors plundered him, and left him standing in his cocked-hat, shirt, and shoes. He was unmounted. Cornwallis took him and other prisoners with him in his retreat to Wilmington." (Ibid.)

43. As Henry Lee concisely wrote of the interval after Webster had been turned back: "The scales of victory now hung balanced, and the hopes of the American commander, which the flight of the Carolinians had depressed, revived at this evidence of firmness and efficiency. These hopes, however, were short lived." (Campaigns of 1781, p. 174.)

44. The American War, 2, 378.

CHAPTER VII

Decision on the Third Line

The decision at Guilford came along the American third line where the Continentals were arced around the curve of the rising ground just west and across Hunting Creek from the courthouse on the north side of the Salisbury Road. As previously noted, the Continentals consisted of two brigades, one Virginia (on the American right) and one Maryland (on the left), each having two regiments. Kirkland's Delawares had come into the line and Washington's cavalry had taken a position just south of the road on an elevation with a view over the open ground toward the line. There were two 6-pounders in the center of the line and Singleton had withdrawn his two to the left flank adjacent to the 2d Maryland.¹

In brief digest Cornwallis tells of this action, which began as the 2nd Battalion of Guards raced to attack the Second Maryland Regiment on the American left.²

Glowing with impatience to signalize themselves, they instantly attacked and defeated them, taking two six-pounders; but, pursuing into the wood with too much ardour, were thrown into confusion by a heavy fire, and [were] immediately charged and driven back into the field by Colonel Washington's dragoons, with the loss of the six pounders they had taken.

The enemy's cavalry was soon repulsed by a well-directed fire from two three pounders just brought up by Lieutenant MacLeod, and by the appearance of the grenadiers of the

1. To repeat Tarleton's review of the position, they were "posted facing the wood where the two lines of militia were drawn up. General Greene had chosen open ground, in front of the court house, for the great part of his regulars. The flanks did not dress up to the center, but were drawn back, so that each brigade presented a different front: Two six-pounders were placed on a small eminence which looked upon the road. The position of these brigades was near six hundred yards in the rear of the second line." (Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 279.)

2. Cornwallis to Germain, March 17 from Guilford quoted in Willcox, The American Rebellion, pp. 500-01.

Guards, and of the Seventy-first Regiment, which, having been impeded by some deep ravines, were now coming out of the wood on the right of the Guards, opposite to the Court House.

By the spirited exertions of Brigadier General O'Hara (though wounded) the second battalion of the Guards was soon rallied and, supported by the grenadiers, returned to the charge with the greatest alacrity. The Twenty-third Regiment arriving at that instant from our left,³ and Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton having advanced with part of the cavalry, the enemy were soon put to flight and the two six-pounders once more fell into our hands. Two ammunition wagons, and two other six-pounders, being all the artillery they had in the field, were likewise taken. About this time the Thirty-third Regiment and light infantry of the Guards, and after overcoming many difficulties, completely routed the corps which was opposed to them, and put an end to the action in this quarter.

General Greene did not detail the action even as fully as did Cornwallis; however, he did recount the point at which he made the decision to withdraw, and the implementation of this decision actually made the action that followed, as heroic and as well fought as it was, anti-climactic.⁴ He was determined not to risk all, but to preserve a force to fight again.

3. This unit (as Robert Graves described in his Proceed Sergeant Lamb, p. 184) had "re-formed in the skirt of the wood just short of the farmland behind which the Court House stood. To their left ran a road, on the right was a small hill." This reference to a road on the left seemingly is in error, unless it refers to other than the New Garden Road, as it conflicts with Cornwallis's direction here, which evidently was made in reference to the cannon near the road. Graves does not give the specific source of his data.

4. Greene's letter of March 16 to the President of Congress quoted in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 498.

Henry Lee quotes Colonel Carrington as saying he heard the order for the retreat and that it was delivered when the 2nd Maryland gave way. (Campaigns of 1781, p. 196.)

They Green wrote, having broken the Second Maryland Regiment and turned our left flank, got into the rear of the Virginia Brigade and appearing to be gaining our right--which would have encircled the whole of the Continental troops--I thought it most advisable to order a retreat.⁵

About this time Lieutenant Colonel Washington made a charge with the horse upon a part of the brigade of Guards. And the First Regiment of Marylanders, commanded by Colonel Gunby and seconded by Lieutenant Colonel Howard, followed the horse with the bayonets. Near the whole of the party fell a sacrifice. General Huger was the last that was engaged, and gave the enemy a check.

Now in more detail, as the 2nd battalion of Guards, perhaps 250 strong, struck out across the open ground on attack, their objective was the American left flank. This, on the crest of the rise before them, likely was at the time the only clearly visible unit. Especially visible were the cannon overlooking the road on the extreme left end of the American line. It was held by the untried 2nd Maryland Regiment and the two cannon were those brought into place by Singleton after he fell back down the

5. At this point Greene did not have bright prospects. Both of his militia lines were now broken and scattered and he did not know how effective they had been. He had no word on the contest to the south, or the then-whereabouts of Lee's cavalry and infantrymen and Campbell's riflemen. The 1st Maryland had just had a taste of action. The 2nd Maryland was now disintegrated. This left only his untried Virginia brigade and Washington's horse troopers.

Henry Lee summarized: "Having seen the flight of the second regiment of Maryland, preceded by that of the North Carolina militia, the corps of Lee severed from the army, and considering it, if not destroyed, at least thrown out of the battle...and in all probability not able to regain its station in the line--Greene, immutable in the resolution never to risk the annihilation of his force, and adverting to his scanty supply of ammunition, determined, when he found all his personal efforts, seconded by Colonels Williams and Carrington, to rally the second regiment of Maryland nugatory, to provide for retreat." (Memoirs of the War, p. 281.)

road following the cannonade that opened the battle. As the Guards went in with a rush across the some 300 yards of open field, the Marylanders fired but feebly and took to their heels. They broke and ran without a fight enabling the Guards easily to seize the two field pieces.⁶

The way being clear, the Guards continued the pursuit of the Americans into the woods in a direction that would soon put them behind the Virginia brigade. But it would not all go so easily for the Guards, though it would, as already noted, trigger Greene's decision for retreat and its implementation.⁷

In the words of Henry Lee:

Stuart discovering Ford's regiment of Maryland on the left of the first regiment, and a small copse of wood concealing Gunby, pushed forward upon Ford, who was strengthened by Captain Finley /Singleton/ with two six-pounders. Colonel Williams commanding the Maryland line, charmed with the late demeanour of the first regiment, hastened toward the second, expecting a similar display, and prepared to combine his whole force with all practicable celerity; when, unaccountably, the second regiment gave way, abandoning to the enemy the two field pieces.⁸

6. As William Johnson summarized it, this "put Singleton's two pieces of artillery into the enemy's possession; and they, too much occupied with the victory before them, to notice the danger approaching rushed on as the Maryland regiment gave way, with loud shouts of victory." (Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 11.)

7. According to Henry Lee: "After a disorderly fire, this regiment which was newly raised, and badly organized, took to flight, and General Greene became again diffident; and being resolved not to risk the loss of his regular troops, prepared to retire, by ordering his strongest regiment to the rear, to serve as a rallying corps." This was Col. John Green's Virginia Regiment. (Campaigns of 1781, p. 174.)

8. Memoirs of the War, pp. 279-80.

The Guards saw neither Washington with his dragoons moving in on their rear, nor the 1st Maryland approaching their left flank. They were hit suddenly and savagely by Washington and then by Howard.

Washington with his dragoons came charging in from the rear with sabers flashing, initially enjoying an element of surprise. The second surprise and shock for Stuart, who led the Guards (O'Hara having been wounded), came from his left. Gunby, on returning to his position in the line after his 1st Marylanders had been instrumental in pushing Webster back across the ravine, had word of the Guards on the rampage. His regiment turned toward the new threat and, when at rather close range, fired into them from the flank. Brush and woods had kept them from view. Then with bayonets at the ready, Howard led a vicious charge. Gunby himself was not in the lead of his regiment now, having been thrown when his horse became involved in its gear.⁹ Delay in freeing himself had caused him to fall behind. But Howard, his second, was fully adequate to the occasion. The action became close and personal, hand to hand; and the toll was heavy, especially for the Guards. Washington drove all the way through the battalion and turned back into them. Howard and his Marylanders pressed hard. This forced the Guards back into the open field and they had to give up their captured 6-pounders. They were now a broken unit. As Tarleton tersely put it, "...the Maryland brigade followed by Washington's cavalry moving upon them before they could receive assistance, retook the cannons, and repulsed the guards with great slaughter."¹⁰

Going into the Guards with William Washington was a company of militia dragoons that Thomas Watkins had raised in Prince Edward County, Virginia. Philemon Holcomb was one of its lieutenants. In later life Holcomb would often relate the circumstances of the charge in words like these: "Leaping a ravine, the swords of the horsemen were upon the heads of the enemy, who were rejoicing in victory and safety; and before they suspected danger, multitudes lay dead. The strong arm of [Peter] Francisco levelled

9. As Lee reported: "His horse being killed at the instant, and himself entangled in the fall the charge was led by Lieut.-Col. Howard." (Campaigns of 1781, p. 174.)

10. In his description of this affair Tarleton, obviously not an eyewitness, erred in some of his factual detail. "In the center the 2d battalion of guards, commanded by Lieutenant-colonel Stewart, supported by the grenadiers, made a spirited and successful attack on the enemy's six-pounders which they took from the Delaware regiment." According to Cornwallis the grenadiers were not yet in the fray, the Delawares were in another part of the line, and the cannon taken then were those on the left flank, not those posted in the center. Besides, Greene, Williams, and others indicate that the Washington dragoons hit the Guards a little before the Marylanders came in though there was little time in between. (Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 281.)

three of the enemy during one charge, and eleven before the fight was over."¹¹

This Francisco, a huge man¹² whose legendanry feats of strength are legion, was a member of the Watkins Company. He had fought long and hard in the Revolution and carried into this fight a huge five-foot broadsword which George Washington had given him, regular swords being too light and small. Though he received a leg wound from a bayonet early in the encounter with the Guards (his fourth in the war) this did not take him out of the fight. But later in the fight he was impaled on a bayonet that sliced deep and ripped upward almost to the hip socket. The shock was terrific, forcing him to leave the action. Having withdrawn a way he collapsed on the battlefield unconscious. After the battle a Quaker named Robinson who was searching the field for those still alive found him, took him to his home and nursed him back to health.¹³

11. William Henry Foote, Sketches of Virginia Historical and Biographical, 1st ser. (Philadelphia, 1850--reissue in Richmond, Va., 1966), p. 403. In another volume (Sketches of North Carolina, p. 278) Foote tells more of the Francisco performance, his material coming from the same source. "In that short encounter, he cut down eleven men with his brawny arm and terrible broadsword. One of the guards thrust his bayonet, and in spite of the parrying of Francisco's sword, pinned his leg to the horse. Francisco forebare to strike, but assisted him to extricate his bayonet. As the soldier turned and fled, he made a furious blow with his sword, and cleft the poor fellows head down to his shoulders. The force of the blow, added to the soldier's speed, sent him on a number of steps, with his cleft head hanging upon each shoulder before he fell."

12. By one note he weighed 279 pounds and was some 6 feet, 6 inches tall. (Gray, "The Monuments of Guilford Courthouse NMP," pt. 2, p. 90.)

13. Fred J. Cook, "Francisco the Incredible," American Heritage, 10, No. 6, (Oct. 1950), 22-25, 92-95; James R. V. Daniel, "The Giant of Virginia, Alias the Hercules of the Revolution," Virginia Cavalcade, 1 (1951), 36-39.

It is said that William Washington was so impressed with his performance he urged him to take a commission, but Francisco declined believing that he was not sufficiently educated.

In later life one Nathaniel Shade, who fought as one of Butler's men at Guilford, recalled that "after the retreat" he had stopped "with many others, at the court-house, to witness the meeting of the British with the continentals in the Old Fields." By his account "this conflict between the brigade of guards and the first regiment of Marylanders, was most terrific; for they fired at the same instant, and they had approached so near that the blazes from the muzzles of their guns seemed to meet."¹⁴

In the melee there was one incident that was well remembered. This was the slaying of Lieutenant Colonel Stuart, then commander of the Guards, who was struck down by an American captain, one John Smith of the 1st Maryland. It is said that they had clashed before and that each had vowed that blood would be spilled if they met again in battle.¹⁵ Smith's business partner later told the story to William R. Davie:¹⁶

In the midst of the battle at Guilford, while the American and British troops were intermixed with a charge of bayonets, Smith and his men were in a throng, killing the Guards and Grenadiers like so many Furies. Colonel Stewart, seeing the mischief Smith was doing, made up to him through the crowd, dust and smoke, and made a violent lunge at him with his small sword. The first that Smith saw was the shining metal like lightning at his bosom; he only had time to lean a little to his left and lift up his left arm so as to let the polished steel pass under it when the hilt struck his breast. It would have run through his body but for the haste of the Colonel, and happening to set his foot on the arm of a man Smith had just cut down, his unsteady step, his violent lunge, and missing his aim brought him down to one knee on the dead man. The Guards came rushing up very strong. Smith had no alternative but to wheel around and give Stewart a back-handed

14. Caruthers, Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 118.

15. William Johnson recounted: "They had also met before on some occasion, and had vowed that their next meeting should end in blood." (Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 12.)

16. Quoted in Rankin, The American Revolution, pp. 287-88.

blow over, or across the head,¹⁷ on which he fell.

His orderly sergeant attacked Smith, but Smith's sergeant dispatched him. A second attacked him; Smith hewed him down. A third behind him threw down a cartridge and shot him in the back of the head. Smith now fell among the slain, but was taken up by his men and brought off. It was found to be only a buck shot lodged against the skull and had only stunned him.¹⁸

Perhaps some of the most graphic language describing this confused fighting of the Guards, Marylanders, and Dragoons came from the pen of Henry Lee:

Assailed in flank and front, this bold battalion could not long maintain the conflict, which became broken and disorderly, into a tumult of duels...the Smith versus Stuart affair being one. The guards fell in heaps around the guns they had taken; and their leader slain, were driven back into the open ground; many prostrated by the horse--many killed or captured by the pursuing infantry. The remnant fled for protection to their friends, but received the balls directed at their enemies.¹⁹

After passing through the Guards, William Washington, leading his van as was customary with him, is said to have seen a British officer with several others appearing as aides-de-camp who had moved toward the action as if to make an evaluation. He believed that this might be Cornwallis

17. In Johnson's account it is given that: "the heavy sabre of his antagonist cleft the Briton to the spine" (also, see below).

18. Other versions of this can be found in Johnson (Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 12) and in Caruthers (Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., pp. 117-18), who draws on the Johnson account. Also it is of interest that in 1889 David Schenck wrote that he had "a sword exhumed near the scene of the conflict between British Stuart and American Smith. It is beautifully chased with a coat of arms and is of the finest steel. Its scabbard is German silver." (North Carolina, 1780-1781, p. 367.)

19. Campaigns of 1781, p. 175.

and made a move in that direction to attempt to surprise and capture the party. However, when detected his dragoons moved back and away.²⁰

Likely this was indeed Cornwallis who "came down from his post, where the Salisbury road enters the wood, to the hollow, to see the condition of the battle." Having made his reconnaissance he returned to a position with his artillery.²¹ General Greene, too, had his moment of personal exposure and high danger about this same time as he also ventured out along the road for a better view of the confused action. On March 18 he wrote of this to his wife: "I had not the honor of being wounded, but I was very near being taken, having rode in the heat of the action full tilt into the midst of the enemy; but by Colonel Morris' calling to me advertising me of my situation, I had just time to retire."²²

20. Marshall, The Life of Washington, 4, 375n.

Actually the story is that in his rush Washington lost his cap and when he leaped down to retrieve it the officer then at the head of the column was shot through the body, a shot that rendered him incapable of managing his horse. The frightened horse wheeled around and galloped off with his rider. The rest of the troop seeing this followed, assuming that it was an ordered movement.

21. William Foote tells this story and combines it with another version of the Washington mishap. Cornwallis "under the cover of the smoke" rode up to an old oak tree "just in the skirts of the fiery contest. Washington who had drawn off his troops, was hovering around to watch his opportunity for another onset, and approached that same oak unperceived by his lordship; stopping to beckon on his men to move and intercept the officer, then unknown to him, he happened to strike his unlaced helmet from his head. On recovering it, he perceived the white horse that carried the officer on the full gallop towards the artillery posted on the rising ground, where the road emerges from the woods." (Sketches of North Carolina, p. 278; See also Johnson, Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 12.)

22. Quoted in G. W. Greene, Life of Nathanael Greene, 3, 208. For some embellishment of this see Foote, Sketches of North Carolina, pp. 278-79, and Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 120. Others have noted that Greene was warned by Major Burnet, or Captain Pendleton, rather than Morris as Greene wrote. (Thayer, Nathanael Greene, p. 329; Johnson, Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 13.)

Having made his reconnaissance, Cornwallis returned to his artillery atop its dominating rise and gave orders to fire grapeshot into the confused mass of Marylanders, dragoons, and Guards--though it would be into both friend and foe alike and over the objection²³ of the Guards commander, O'Hara, who though wounded²⁴ was close by. Cornwallis hoped that it would check the momentum of the Americans and it did. The British commander reported: "The enemy's cavalry was soon repulsed by a well-directed fire from two three-pounders just brought up by Lieutenant Macleod." As Henry Lee phrased it, "Cornwallis with furious decision, ordered his artillery to fire, sacrificing the fugitives to check the pursuit."²⁵

The effect of the cannonade was to stop the 1st Marylanders and the cavalry while the Guards fell back in disarray. "Howard and Washington drew back, the former finding the retreat had commenced and seeing two regiments advancing toward him." He "believing himself to be out of support, retired, followed by Washington."²⁶

23. This story recounted in various reminiscences is told as succinctly and graphically as in most by Foote: "His lordship gave orders to Lieutenant McLeod to charge with grape-shot, and fire in upon the contending mass of men. O'Hara, who had been carried wounded to that position, heard the fatal orders, and begged the commander to spare his fine troops. His lordship repeated the orders sternly, and stood by the devouring cannon till the regiments who were yielding ground to the Maryland forces rallied, and bravely, or rather desperately, renewed the contest." (Sketches of North Carolina, p. 278.)

24. It is not clear when O'Hara received his "two dangerous wounds." Evidently Stuart led the Guards into the third American line. This being true they would seem likely to have occurred during the drive through the militia lines. He may have been with the grenadiers at the time.

25. In his report of March 17 to Germain, in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 314; Lee, Campaigns of 1781, p. 175.

Foote records another interesting bit about the action: "The battle at the court-house abounded in acts of heroism and also of cowardice. In that contest, when the grape shot poured upon the contending forces, it is said some of the British officers fell as if dead, and were plundered, but after the battle were not reported either among the wounded or missing." (Sketches of North Carolina, p. 279.)

26. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 280, and Campaigns of 1781, p. 175.

The British regiments that Howard noted were the 71st (south of the Great Road) and the 23rd (north of it); these "being at length released by the retreat of the Virginians had reached the open ground in front of the continentals."²⁷ To these, O'Hara "though grievously wounded, rallied the routed guards [with the now-appearing grenadiers]."²⁸ "This filled the interval between the left and right wing," thus reforming a front for a new advance. Now, too, "Webster with the thirty-third, returned into line" ready for another encounter with the now-retreating Americans.²⁹

Webster, having come again into line, drove across the vale in front of him toward Huger's Virginia brigade. The brigade now was represented only by Hawes's Regiment, that of John Greene having already been pulled back to cover the American retreat. This was a brief action that both American and British commanders considered successful, largely, perhaps, because of their different objectives. Greene's retreat was now well along and he did not expect Hawes to make a determined stand. The British on the other hand hoped to crush the regiment and rout it. On this Greene commented: "General Huger was the last that was engaged, and he gave the enemy a check. We retreated in good order to the Reedy-fork river." Cornwallis viewed it thus: "About this time the 33rd regiment and the light infantry of the guards, after overcoming many difficulties, completely routed the corps which was opposed to them, and put an end to the action in this quarter."³⁰

27. Ibid.

28. Presumably the grenadiers had suffered heavily in their progress into the militia lines. Tarleton noted that the "The grenadiers, after all their officers were wounded attached themselves to the artillery and the cavalry, who were advancing upon the main road." (Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 282.)

29. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 280, and Campaigns of 1781, p. 175.

30. Letters in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 324, 315.

Lee also detailed this action: "General Huger, who had, throughout the action, given his chief attention to the regiment of Hawes, the only one of the two constituting his brigade ever engaged, and which, with Kirkwood's company, was still contending with Lieutenant-Colonel Webster, now drew it off by order of the general; while Colonel William's effected the same object in his quarter." (Memoirs of the War, p. 282.)

In the last stages of the fighting along the American third line, Greene was concerned principally with disengagement and retreat. He wrote, "...the Militia were drove back upon the Continental Troops which made the Action general, but the Enemy breaking through the 2d Maryland Regiment terminated the future of the day in their favor."³¹ He was pleased with the success of his withdrawal:

We retreated in good order to the Reedy Fork River, and crossed at the ford about three miles from the field of action, and then halted and drew up the troops until we collected most of the stragglers...After collecting our stragglers we retired to this camp, ten miles from Guilford."³²

Greene regretted that he had to abandon his cannon on the field, but it was for good reason: "We lost our artillery and two ammunition waggons, the greater part of the horses being killed before the retreat began and it being impossible to move the pieces but along the Great Road."³³ The latter was now cut by the advancing British. Presumably the reformed Guards reclaimed the two pieces they had taken (but to lose) while the 23rd Regiment came on to the two pieces of Finley which had marked the center of the last line.³⁴

31. His letter of March 16 to Jefferson in Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 156.

32. Letter of March 16 to the President of Congress in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 498.

33. Letters of March 16 in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 498.

Lee concluded that though the cannon was mounted on traveling carriages with limbers and boxes complete "General Greene preferred leaving his artillery, to risking the loss of lives in dragging them off by hand." (Memoirs of the War, p. 282.)

34. Sir Thomas Saumarez related that after the Virginians of the second line had been dispersed, "the Royal Welch attacked and captured two brass six-pounders, having assisted in the attack and defeat of the third line and reserve of the Americans." This would have been when his regiment was in pursuit of the withdrawing Americans. (Broughton-Mainwaring, Royal Welch Fusiliers, p. 101.)

Cornwallis soon knew that Greene was withdrawing from the action and the battlefield. Whereupon "The Twenty-third and Seventy-first Regiments, with part of the cavalry, were ordered to pursue. The remainder of the cavalry was detached with Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton to our right, where a heavy fire still continued."³⁵

Eventually the action to the south had begun to wane as it moved to an area "above a mile distant from the center of the British army."³⁶ When Henry Lee had noted that Norton was seeking to break off and move toward the main battle to the northeastward, he concluded that no decision was likely to come in this quarter. Lee then sent his cavalry "to repair to the left of the continentals, there to act until further orders." He and his infantry then turned on the Germans forcing them to fall back. They were further pursued by Campbell and his riflemen. At this junction "Lee, with his infantry and one company of riflemen, pressed forward to join the continentals, and to take his appropriate station on their left. In his progress he again encountered and repelled the guards under Norton, and passing to the right of the British, after Greene had retreated, joined his cavalry near the court-house."³⁷ This meant that Lee with his Legion horse would not be on hand to counter the British dragoons and protect the riflemen from the coming cavalry charge.³⁸

35. Willcox, American Rebellion, p. 501.

By Tarleton's report, "General Leslie soon afterwards [as the pursuit of the Americans was getting underway] joined Cornwallis, who had advanced a short distance on the Reedy-fork road, with the 23rd and 71st regiments, to support the other squadron of the British legion, who followed the rear of the continentals." (Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 283.)

36. Robert Rankin, of the Buffalo congregation, who participated in the battle as a young volunteer and "fell in with Campbell's riflemen," confirmed this distance. This was during a visit to the battlefield in later life with Caruthers. He told of the fighting, pointing out the corps' first position and the route of its retirement "until they were at least a mile from the Court House, and nearly due south." (Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 121.)

37. Campaigns of 1781, pp. 177 ff.

38. Some have been critical of Lee's withdrawal from this scene and of his failure, when he withdrew, not to have reached the continentals. None has been more outspoken than William Johnson who quite plainly was antagonistic to Lee and not too careful in his reporting. He seems willing to accept General Davie's recollections (although some other of Davie's details are not in order) that Campbell was highly provoked: "On the day

It had not been a particularly good afternoon for Lee. At the outset he was sorely disappointed that his corps had not initially inflicted the kind of punishment on the British that he thought their position should have guaranteed. Then, too, he had been unable to hold to the end of the Virginia line as the battle plan intended and as Washington did so well on the opposite flank.³⁹ Then he withdrew from the isolated affair on the American left evidently not informing Campbell of his departure and only to be followed in by Tarleton. Finally he reached his destination too late to join the continentals, even in their retreat. The left flank corps had, however, been able to tie up two British units during most of the battle, the Bose Regiment and the 1st Battalion of Guards. Even so it appears that this was in no way communicated to General Greene. It could, perhaps, have influenced some of his decisions had he gotten some word of what was going on here. Certainly Lee, who failed in communications, was of this view.⁴⁰

after the action, Campbell was extremely indignant at this movement, and spoke freely of Lee's conduct. Lee was, however, sent the same day, to watch the enemy's movements, and Campbell's regiment were soon after discharged and we heard no more of it." (Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 13-17.)

39. In the beginning "The appearance in this quarter was so favorable, that sanguine hopes were entertained by many of the officers, from the manifest advantage possessed, of breaking down the enemy's right before he approached the fence; and the troops exhibited the appearance of great zeal and alacrity." The failure here Lee blamed altogether on the "flight of the North Carolinians" as he did the "chasm in our order of battle" with its "extremely detrimental consequences" of isolating the left flank corps. "It threw the corps of Lee out of combination with the army and also exposed it to destruction." (Memoirs of the War, pp. 277-78.)

40. "Had General Greene," Lee wrote, "known how severely his enemy was crippled, and that the corps under Lee had fought their way to his Continental line, he would certainly have continued the conflict; and in all probability would have made it a drawn day, if not have secured to himself the victory." This was in retrospect only as was Tarleton's view that had Greene pushed the Marylanders and Washington's dragoons to seize the elevation from which the British cannon fired he might have had victory. It was, however, too late for both as retreat had begun and troops and support were not available. (Memoirs of the War, p. 282; Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 285.)

It was the continuing fire between Campbell's men and those of the Bose Regiment (even though a mile away) that attracted Cornwallis's attention as the fight along the third line subsided and Greene's withdrawal got underway. Then, in the words of Tarleton:⁴¹

Earl Cornwallis did not think it advisable for the British cavalry to charge the enemy, who were retreating in good order, but directed Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton to proceed with a squadron of dragoons to the assistance of Major-general Leslie on the right, where, by the constant fire which was yet maintained, the affair seemed not to be determined. The right wing, from the thickness of the woods and a jealousy for its flank, had imperceptibly inclined to the right, by which movement it had a kind of separate action after the front line of the Americans gave way, and was now engaged with several bodies of militia and riflemen above a mile distant from the center of the British army. The 1st battalion of the guards, commanded by Lieutenant-colonel Norton, and the regiment of Bose, under Major DeBuy, had their share of the difficulties of the day, and owing to the nature of the light troops opposite to them, could never make any

41. Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 282.

Stedman relates it more briefly than Tarleton yet does reinforce some of the major points: "The firing heard on the right after the termination of the action in the center, and on the left, induced Cornwallis to detach Tarleton, with part of his cavalry, to gain intelligence of what was going on in that quarter, and to know whether General Leslie wanted assistance. But before Tarleton's arrival on the right, the affair was over, and the British troops were standing with ordered arms; all resistance having ceased on the part of the Americans, except for a few hardy riflemen, who, lurking behind trees, occasionally fired their pieces." The remaining opposition "Tarleton, when requested, readily undertook to disperse with his cavalry, and rushing forward under cover of a general volley of musquetry from the guards and the regiment of Bose, quickly performed what was expected of him." (The American War, 2, 381.)

impression: As they advanced, the Americans gave ground in front, and inclined to their flanks: This sort of conflict was continued some time when the British cavalry, on their way to join them found officers and men of both corps wounded, and in possession of the enemy: The prisoners were quickly rescued from the hands of their captors, and the dragoons reached General Leslie without delay. As soon as the cavalry arrived, the guards⁴² and the Hessians were directed to fire a volley upon the largest party of the militia, and, under the cover of the smoke, Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton doubled round the right flank of the guards, and charged the Americans with considerable effect.⁴³ The enemy gave way on all sides, and were routed with confusion and loss.⁴⁴ Thus ended a general action, and in the main, a well-contested action, which had lasted upwards of two hours.

42. It would appear that the 1st Battalion of Guards as a unit had already left the area. Perhaps Tarleton was in error here, or perhaps, being scattered some had attached themselves to the Hessian Regiment.

43. It was said that "The greatest loss of Rockbridge and Augusta forces in this sector was experienced after they commenced their retreat. Lee's light-horse were not ready to cover them, and their retreat became a flight, exposed to the sabres of the British light-horse." "In their flight they lost more than in the battle; fortunately the enemy was not prepared to pursue their foe, and the butchery was soon over." (Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 1st ser., p. 377, and 2nd ser., p. 146.)

There were two with Maj. Joseph Winston that day, Richard Taliaferro and Jesse Franklin, who ran for their horses (which had been tied behind the battle zone) being pursued by the dragoons. They reached their horses; however, before they could mount a horseman was upon them. Franklin escaped but Taliaferro was cut down. Tradition says that he was the last man to fall at Guilford and Franklin is supposed to have returned and buried him. (Gray, "The Monuments at Guilford Courthouse NMP," Pt. 2, p. 99.)

-44. Cornwallis noted that he sent Tarleton "to our right, where a heavy fire still continued" and "where his appearance and spirited attack contributed much to a speedy termination of the action. The militia with which our right had been engaged dispersed in the woods." (Letter to Germain, March 17, in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 501.)

Of Tarleton's charge Samuel Houston had this to say:

But presently their light horse came on us, and not being defended by our own light horse, nor reinforced,--though firing was long ceased in all other parts, we were obliged to run, and many were sore chased and some cut down. We lost our major and captain then, the battle lasting two hours and twenty-five minutes. We all scattered; and some of our party and Campbell's and Moffitt's collected together, and with Capt. Moffitt and Major Pope, we marched for headquarters.⁴⁵

Lee added a note to this, stating that Campbell "with his hardy riflemen was the last American engaged." "He still annoyed the regiment of Bose, and the action being terminated elsewhere, Tarleton was detached with a body of dragoons to extricate it. This he readily effected; Campbell deemed further opposition fruitless and his brave riflemen, after firing a few shots retired."⁴⁶

45. Houston "Journal" (Foot, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., p. 144).

There were also other observations and recollections of this charge, like that by Robert Rankin: "Cornwallis finding the Hessians were still engaged in the woods to the south, sent Tarleton with his dragoons to extricate them, and bring them up, which he did, and with some loss to the riflemen, as they were wholly unsupported." (Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 121.)

46. Campaigns of 1781, pp. 177 ff.

Lee phrased this a little differently in his Memoirs of the War (p. 283) though the substance is generally the same:

The pertinacity with which the rifle corps of Campbell and the Legion Infantry had maintained the battle on the enemy's right induced Lord Cornwallis to detach the British horse to that quarter. The contest had long been ebbing before his corps arrived; and Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton found only a few resolute marksmen in the rear of Campbell, who continued firing from time to time. The appearance of the cavalry determined these brave fellows to retire and overtake their corps.

CHAPTER VIII

Retreat and the Aftermath

With General Greene's withdrawal in motion,

The seventy-first pushed forward to an eminence at the Court-house, on the left flank of the continentals. Lieutenant-colonel Webster again advanced across the ravine, defeated the corps which was opposed to him, and connected himself with the center of the British line. The continentals of the American army now being driven from their ground, as well as the militia, a general retreat took place; but it was conducted with order and regularity. The twenty-third and seventy-first regiments, with part of the cavalry, were at first sent in pursuit of the enemy, but afterwards received orders to return.¹

There were good reasons for the lack of vigor in Cornwallis's pursuit, as he himself wrote:

The militia with which our right had been engaged dispersed in the woods the Continentals went off by the Reedy Fork, beyond which it was not in my power to follow them--as their cavalry had suffered but little, our troops were excessively fatigued by an action which lasted an hour and a half, and our wounded dispersed over an extensive space of country, required immediate attention. The care of our wounded, and the total want of

1. Stedman, The American War, 2, 379.

Sir Thomas Saumarez stated that such men of the 23rd and 71st regiments "as had strength remaining were ordered to pursue the dispersed enemy. This they did in so persevering a manner, that they killed or wounded as many as they could overtake, until being completely exhausted, they were obliged to halt, after which they returned as best they could to rejoin the army at Guildford Court-house." (Quoted in Grant, British Battles, 2, 172, and also in Broughton-Mainwaring, Royal Welch Fusiliers, p. 101.)

provisions in an exhausted country, made it equally impossible for me to follow the blow the next day. The enemy did not stop until they got to the ironworks on Troublesome Creek, eighteen miles from the field of battle.²

Col. John Greene's regiment of Virginians was in place to check the pursuing British soldiers and to cover the retreat. Also, Washington's cavalry was at hand. St. George Tucker described one incident in which this check was applied. It had to do with the detachment of dragoons from Tarleton's corps that Cornwallis had designated for his pursuit force.

We were soon ordered to retreat. Whilst we were doing so, Tarleton advanced to attack us with his horse; but a party of continentals, who were fortunately close behind us, gave him so warm a reception that he retreated with some degree of precipitation. A few minutes after we halted by the side of an old field fence, and observed him surveying us at a distance of two or three hundred yards. He did not think it proper to attack us again, as we were advantageously posted; and the continentals, who had encountered him just before, were still in our rear.³

Henry Lee in describing Greene's preparations for retreat commented that "Colonel Greene, one of the bravest of the brave soldiers, with his regiment of Virginia, was drawn off without having tasted of battle, and

2. Cornwallis's report to Germain, March 17, in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 501.

In his brief summary of the "sharp action" for Lord Rawdon also penned on March 17, Cornwallis was even more precise: "The great fatigue of the troops, the Number of Wounded & the want of Provisions, prevented our pursuing them beyond the Reedy Fork." He bemoaned the loss of a number of his officers, mentioning those killed or "mortally wounded" by name. (Copy of original letter in the William L. Clements Library in files of Guilford Courthouse NMP.)

3. "The Southern Campaign: 1781" in Mag. of Am. History, 7, 41. Then Tucker concluded: "After this, the whole army retreated in good order to the iron works, fifteen miles from the field of battle, having lost the field and our artillery."

ordered to a given point in the rear for the security of this movement." And the retreat across the valley of Hunting Creek to the Reedy Fork Road near the courthouse soon became orderly and unhurried.⁴ The American commander crossed the Reedy Fork after some three miles and drew up behind it so that as many as possible "of the stragglers and fugitives" who had become separated from the main body of the army could rejoin it. After a wait and rest of several hours ("some little time"), Greene resumed his withdrawal "to Speedwell's Iron Works, ten miles distant from Guilford." In this last leg of the retreat Lee reports that the army "retired leisurely" to its "former position."⁵

It was a miserable, dark night with the rain pouring incessantly. But all went well as Charles Magill, who was with Huger and his Virginians, glowingly wrote Jefferson the next day, May 16: "Never was ground contested for [in battle] with greater obstinacy, and never were Troops drawn off in better order."⁶

Except for some scattered corps and detachments Greene's army reached the old, and now familiar, encampment at the ironworks in the early morning hours about as day was breaking on March 16. Greene himself was thoroughly exhausted.⁷ It was not until later in the day that Henry Lee arrived with his cavalry. Reaching the courthouse the afternoon before, after the retreat had begun, he sought headquarters by another

4. Memoirs of the War, pp. 281-82.

Initially in the withdrawal there was some confusion in the disengagement. Theodore Thayer related that "According to one of Greene's aides, the Continentals, finding it impossible to get away with a large number of prisoners, bayoneted the helpless men rather than have them recovered by the enemy." In support of this Thayer cites a letter of E. Giles to one Hawley, dated March 27, 1781, in R. W. Gibbes, Documentary History, 3, 43-44 (Nathanael Greene, p. 329).

5. Gordon, Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 175; Stedman, The American War, 2, 386; Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 282-83.

Stedman gives the distance from Reedy Fork to Troublesome Creek as "about twelve miles."

6. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 162-63.

7. It is said that he was so fatigued that in relaxation he fainted from sheer exhaustion and for a while lay as if unconscious. He did write his wife after the battle that he had not had his clothes off for six weeks. (Thayer, Nathanael Greene, p. 332; Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 370.)

route, the High Rock Ford Road.⁸ Some of the militia parties had also bivouacked en route as in the case of Samuel Houston's group.⁹

Despite fatigue, Greene, not having sufficient immediate word of Cornwallis's losses, or intentions, soon had his troops making preparations for battle should Cornwallis move again against them. Greene almost hopefully believed this possible and his troops were not pessimistic about the situation though the rainy day was a little discouraging. Through much of the 16th the troops dug their earthworks in the wet, soggy soil of the clay bluffs overlooking Troublesome Creek.¹⁰

8. He "joined his cavalry at the court-house; and, unpursued, retired down the great Salisbury road, until a cross-road enabled him to pass over to the line of retreat." (Memoirs of 1780 and 1781, p. 282; see also Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 370.)

9. Houston graphically recalled some of the rigors endured by his party: "we marched for headquarters, and marched across till we, about dark, came to the road we marched up from Reedy Creek to Guilford the day before, and crossing the creek we marched near four miles, and our wounded, Lusk, Allison, and in particular Jas. Mather, who was bad cut, were so sick we stopped and all being almost wearied out, we marched half a mile, and encamped, where, through darkness and rain, and want of provisions we were in distress. Some parched a little corn. We stretched blankets to shelter some of us from the rain. Our retreat was fourteen miles. As soon as day appeared, (being wet) we decamped, and marched through the rain till we arrived at Speedwell furnace, where Greene had retreated from Guilfordtown, where the battle was fought... there we met many of our company with great joy...After visiting the tents, we eat and living about in tents and rain, when frequently we were rejoiced by men coming in we had given out for lost." (Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., p. 144.)

10. Carrington, Battles of the Revolution, p. 564.

Tarleton observed that "the position and strength of General Greene, at the iron works on Troublesome creek...did not invite the approach of the British army." (Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 286.)

Greene, as he reviewed his unit reports and further evaluated the situation, became increasing optimistic about the damage that had been done to the British army at Guilford. He could write to Governor Abner Nash, which he did at 9:00 a.m. at "the Camp near the Iron Works" on March 18 that: "The Enemy's loss is very great, much more than ours.... However the enemy have gained no advantage, except the ground and field pieces. Their operating force is diminished in such a manner, that I am not without hopes of turning their victory into defeat, if the Militia don't leave me."¹¹ As for the battle itself, Greene summarized to the President of Congress: "In a word, the engagement was long and severe, and the enemy gained their point by superior discipline."¹²

But even on the morning after the battle Greene, in the orders for his troops, did not evince disappointment, but rather high expectancy. These were issued from his then-headquarters at "Speedwell Furnace, on a branch of the Haw River."¹³

...the officers will take every precaution for another field day. The event of the action yesterday, though unfortunate, is by no means decisive, the gallant behavior of the corps of observation, consisting of the detachment of Cavalry and infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Col. Washington and the Legion commanded by Lieut. Col. Lee, & Light Infantry commanded by Col. Campbell, in conjunction with the riflemen under Lynch: the firm

11. This was the same letter in which he told Governor Nash that had the North Carolinians "stood by their officers" that likely there would have been victory on the field. The letter did, however, end on a friendly note. "I shall hope for the honor of seeing you this evening." (Copy of letter in William L. Clements Library in the files of Guilford Courthouse NMP.)

12. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 498.

In his letter of March 20 to Daniel Morgan he noted the "conflict was bloody and severe...and the fate of the day was long and doubtful. But we were obliged to give up the ground." (Graham, Daniel Morgan, p. 372.)

In a letter to his wife Greene expressed the same sentiments but with a personal touch: "The action was long, bloody and severe, many fell, but none of your particular friends. Colonel Williams, who is adjutant general, was very active and greatly exposed." (Quoted in Johnson, Life and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene, 2, 22.)

13. From The State Records of North Carolina, 15 (1898), 430-31.

opposition made by the Virginia Militia, under Brig. Genls. Stephens and Lawson, the good order maintained by the regular troops of Virginia, Commanded by Brig. General Huger & the intrepid behavior of the first Maryland Regiment with the attack of the artillery which was so well served by Captains Singleton and Finley, have rendered success dear to the enemy, must prevent his improving his good fortune & eventually secure victory to the American arms. The Commandants of Regts. will immediately inspect and make report of the state of their ammunition, two days provisions to be drawn and cooked immediately, & the troops to be served with a gill of Rum. A Regimental Field Returns are to be made & delivered to the Deputy Adjut. General by 4 o'clock P.M., in which the killed wounded and missing are to be accounted for; the Commissioned Officers to be named.

Though little of good for him came out of the battle, Cornwallis too was loud in his praise of the fighting his officers and troops had done. This is clear in his report of the battle to Lord George Germain in England, which he penned on the battlefield on March 17:¹⁴

I have been particularly indebted to Major-general Leslie for his gallantry and exertion in the action, as well as his assistance in every other part of the service. The zeal and spirit of Brigadier-general O'Hara merit my highest commendations; for after receiving two dangerous wounds he continued in the field whilst the action lasted; by his earnest attention on all other occasions, seconded by the officers and soldiers of his brigade: His Majesty's guards are no less distinguished by their order and discipline than by their spirit and valour. The Hessian regiment of Bose deserves my warmest praises for its discipline, alacrity, and courage, and does honour to Major du Buy, who commands it, and who is an officer of superior merit, I am much obliged to Brigadier-general Howard, who served as a volunteer, for his spirited example on all occasions. Lieutenant-colonel Webster conducted his brigade like an officer of experience and gallantry. Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton's good conduct and spirit in the management of his

14. Given in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 317.

cavalry was conspicuous during the whole action; and Lieutenant Macleod, who commanded the artillery, proved himself upon this, as well as all former occasions, a most capable and deserving officer. The attention and exertions of my aide-de-camps, and of all the other public officers of the army, contributed very much to the success of the day.

The night of March 15 was an even longer and more grueling one for the British than the Americans. They were without food and camped on the battlefield itself. It was cold and dark here too with a driving rain and little shelter. The battle had covered a rather wide area, more than a square mile and most of it was wooded. The dead and wounded of both sides were widely scattered over it. As Stedman wrote:¹⁵

The night of the day on which the action happened was remarkable for its darkness, accompanied with rain, which fell in torrents. Near fifty of the wounded it is said, sinking under their aggravated miseries, expired before the morning. The crys of the wounded and dying, who remained on the field of action during the night exceeded all description. Such a complicated scene of honour and distress, it is hoped, for the sake of humanity, rarely occurs, even in a military life.¹⁶

15. The American War, 2, 384.

16. Sergeant Lamb sought to capture some of this in verse:

What loads of mangled flesh and limbs
(A dismal carnage!) bath'd in reeking gore,
Lay welt'ring on the ground; while flitting life,
Convuls'd, the nerves still shivering, nor had lost
All taste of pain! Here an old vet'ran lies
Deform'd with years, and scars, and groans aloud
Torn with fresh wounds; but inward vitals firm
Forbid the soul's remove, and chain it down
By the hard laws of nature, to sustain
Long Torment; his wild eye balls roll; his teeth,
Gnashing with anguish, chide his ling'ring fate.
(Occurrences During the Late American War, pp. 357-58.)

Henry Lee echoed this when he observed that "The night succeeding this day of blood was rainy, dark, and cold; the dead unburied, the wounded unsheltered, the groans of the dying and the shrieks of the living, cast a deeper shade over the gloom of nature. The victorious troops, without tents and without food, participated in sufferings which they could not relieve."¹⁷

Stedman also observed:¹⁸

The wounded of both armies were collected by the British as expeditiously as possible after the action: It was, however, a service that required both time and care, as from the nature of the action they lay dispersed over a great extent of ground. Every assistance was furnished to them, that in the present circumstances of the army could be afforded; but unfortunately the army was destitute of tents, nor was there a sufficient number of houses near the field of battle to receive the wounded.

In regard to the American wounded Cornwallis on the 17th wrote:¹⁹

I cannot ascertain the loss of the enemy, but it must have been considerable; between two and three hundred dead were left upon the field; many of their wounded that were able to move, whilst we were employed in the care of our own, escaped and followed the routed enemy; and our cattle drivers and forage parties have reported to me, that the houses in a circle of six or eight miles round us are full of others: Those that remained we have taken the best care in our power. We took few prisoners, owing to the excessive thickness of the wood facilitating their escape, and every man of our army being repeatedly wanted for action.

17. Memoirs of the War, p. 286.

18. The American War, 2, 384-85.

19. Given in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 316.

Another one of the British wounded added his bit of gruesome detail:²⁰

I never did and hope I never shall experience two such days and nights as those immediately after the battle. We remained on the very ground on which it had been fought, covered with dead, with dying and with hundreds of wounded, rebels as well as our own. A violent and constant rain that lasted about forty hours made it equally impracticable to remove or administer the smallest comfort to many of the wounded. In this situation we expected every moment to be attacked.

There is the story that Cornwallis, on the morning of the 16th, sent officers to deal with the few prisoners who had been taken the day before. There were offers of liberty and money should they now recant and declare loyalty to the King and join the British force. "They had been confined all that dreary, rainy, cold night in a rail pen, herded like cattle and listened to their appeals with silence and sullenness."²¹ They "maintained their stolid indifference" though "drenched with rain and shivering with cold" even when told that the American army had been routed and that Greene was fleeing the state.

Cornwallis soon knew that, though he had won the field, his army had been severely crippled. His losses in killed, wounded, and missing reached more than 25 percent of his battle force (532 by official report) and were particularly heavy in the officer ranks.²² The first order of business on the 16th was "in performing the last offices to the dead, and in providing comfort for the wounded." Henry Lee commented on this:

20. Quoted from a letter from O'Hara to Grafton in Wickwires, Cornwallis, pp. 309-10.

21. Reported in Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 371-72.

The sequel to this story, hardly possible in fact, is said to have come quickly. "Just then the sound of the morning guns from Greene's camp came reverberating from the hills. An old Tar Heel, who had squatted in a corner of the rail pen, heard the familiar signal and, rising with a smile, he cried out: 'Listen, Boys! The Old Cock Is Crowing Again,' and a shout of defiance went up from the rail pen."

22. See Appendix A.

"In executing these sad duties the British general regarded with equal attention friends and foe."²³ Tarleton related: "The wounded of both armies were assembled expeditiously after the action, and the surgeons were directed to separate the British and Hessians, who were severely wounded, from those who could bear the exercise of traveling."²⁴ Even as the British were about this business, residents of the countryside also combed the woods in search of friends, or loved ones.²⁵

In due course the "severely wounded," "to the amount of seventy, with several Americans who were in the situation, were lodged, under the protection of a flag of truce, in New-garden meeting-house, and other adjacent buildings." The wounded who could move would be "placed in the best waggons or on horseback, to attend the motions of the Kings troops" on their departure.²⁶

For the most part the American wounded from the battlefield were collected at the Courthouse and administered to there. St. George Tucker observed that Cornwallis on his departure from the area left "upwards of seventy of his wounded to the clemency of Gen. Greene. Our own wounded, amounting to nearly the same number, were also left at Guilford Court House. But for them Gen. Greene took a receipt as prisoners exchanged."²⁷

Being the victor over Greene and in possession of the battlefield, Cornwallis now sought to influence the local populace. Even so it must have been with tongue in cheek, a last resort, that on the 18th he issued

23. Memoirs of the War, p. 286.

24. Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 286.

25. Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 378-79. Likely, too, some were garnering loot as well.

26. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 286.

As specified in the "After Orders" on March 16: "Seventeen Waggons to set out at Eight O'Clock tomorrow Morning under the Escort of Lt Colo: Hamilton's Corps, & an Offr. & 12 Dragons Each Waggon to carry as many of the Wounded men as can Possibly be put into it - Mr Grant, is desired to take particular care that the men who are sent away in the Waggons tomorrow are such as cannot Possibly Either Ride or walk & at the Same time that their Cases will admit of them being again with the Army, & a Proper Attention to this Order is of the Greatest Consequence." Newsome, "British Orderly Book" (N.C. Hist. Rev., 9, 388-89.)

27. "The Southern Campaign: 1781," Mag. of Am. History, 7, 43.

a proclamation telling of his "compleat victory" over the rebels. It called for the loyal people to come forward and join him, to help him restore orderly government. It "offered pardon to the Americans who had taken part in the rebellion, if they would surrender their arms and ammunition...and retire to their homes to live peaceably." Only "murderers" were excepted. But it had little effect. The people were now not so easily mislead. Greene had even then detached "Lee with his Legion, and the militia rifle corps under Campbell to hang upon the rear" as the British general withdrew. This was to let "the inhabitants of the region through which he passed" know that "our army" had not been "rendered incapable of further resistance."²⁸

Cornwallis also had his eyes on the military spoils of the battle. His General Orders on March 16 specified:²⁹

It is Expected as the Public Service
required it that all arms Accoutrements
&c taken from the Enemy or not in Immediate
use of the Corps (from the Kill'd & Wounded
of the army) are given in Immediately those of
the Enemy to Hd Qrs. Those spare arms of the
Corps to Lt McCloud, Commanding the Royal
Artillery who will give receipts for the same.

Supply continued to be a major concern for the British, and in his orders from headquarters at "Guildford Court house" on the 17th Cornwallis thanked his troops for their understanding:³⁰

Lord Cornwallis desires that the troops will believe
that he is thoroughly sensible of the distress they
suffer for the want of flower [sic] or meal which is
Unfortunately Increased By the Accidental Breaking of
Dents mill last Night, their Continuing here at Present
is Necessary for the Safety of their Wounded Companions,
he knows that it is UnNecessary to add any thing on
this Subject As the Spirit of this Army has so often
Shewn it self as Superior to the Hardships of Hunger
& fatigue, as to the Danger of Battle.

28. Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 287-88; Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 286; Rankin, The American Revolution, p. 289.

29. Newsome, "British Orderly Book" (N.C. Hist. Rev., 9, 388

According to one report the Americans left "about thirteen hundred stand of small arms on the field as well as their artillery." (Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 266.)

30. Newsome, "British Orderly Book" (N.C. Hist. Rev., 9, 389).

Cornwallis remained on the battlefield until March 18 and then began to implement his decision to depart the country. He wrote from "Guildford Court house" on March 17:

This part of the country is so totally destitute of subsistence, that forage is not nearer than nine miles, and the soldiers have been two days without bread; I shall, therefore, leave about seventy of the worst of the wounded cases at the New-garden Quaker-meeting house, with proper assistance, and move the remainder with the army to morrow morning to Bell's mill. I hope our friends will heartily take an active part with us, to which I shall continue to encourage them.³¹

As they left Guilford the British departed "without doing any injury to the village, except burning the house of Mr. Campbell, who lived at the north-west corner of the court-house, and who was probably a Whig."³²

Greene at his headquarters on Troublesome Creek, like Cornwallis at Guilford, early in the day on the 16th was busy dealing with the matters at hand, including the preparation of his position should Cornwallis follow up with a second attack. Greene later wrote of this: "We lay at the ironworks three days, preparing ourselves for another action and expecting the enemy to advance."³³ There was some needed regrouping and this was done with dispatch. As Samuel Houston described one detail of it: "In the evening of the 16th we struck our tents and encamped on the left, when the orders were read to draw provisions and ammunition, to be in readiness, which order struck a panic on the minds of many. Our march five miles."³⁴

Greene had his wounded, too, as many of those who could had left the field with the army. According to St. George Tucker, who was at nearby "Laura Town" when he wrote to his wife on March 18: "One hundred of the wounded are at this place. Of these there are but three broken bones, the rest being flesh wounds--chiefly in the legs and thighs.

31. Quoted in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 318.

32. This is as reported later by Caruthers in Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 173.

33. Letter of March 23 quoted in Willcox, The American Rebellion p. 502.

34. In Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., pp. 144 ff.

Gen. Stevens is wounded in the thigh."³⁵ There was thought too of the wounded in British hands and among others "Doctor Wallace" "went in with a Flag to dress the Wounded."³⁶ Evidently the residents of the locality took in many of the wounded and nursed them. It seems evident too that when Greene reoccupied the battlefield and assumed responsibility for the more seriously wounded (Americans at the courthouse, British at the New Garden Meeting House), he called to the "Society of Friends in the neighborhood." They "immediately tendered their services, to give relief to the afflicted, and left him at full liberty to pursue the retiring enemy."³⁷

35. As for himself he recounted: "When I got to the iron works, Drs. Armstrong and Copeland very kindly assisted me, looking out for a house to lodge in where I might not be inconvenienced by numbers or distressed by the groans of the wounded. I yesterday obtained a leave of absence from camp for a few days for the recovery of strength in my leg." He remarked that General Lawson had been very kind and attentive to him. He noted, too, that "General Greene is also very polite and attentive to the Virginia officers." ("The Southern Campaign: 1781," Mag. of Am. History, 7, 41-43.)

36. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 183.

Wallace also returned with some facts and rumors: The word was that "Genl O'Hara...with several other officers of distinction are Mortally Wounded. Tarleton has lost two of his Fingers, and Lord Cornwallis had three Horses kill'd under him. Our wounded in their hands are about seventy five."

37. Garden, Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War, pp. 81-82.

William Gordon had this to say:

Greene having no means of providing for the wounded of his own, and the British forces [after Cornwallis's withdrawal], wrote a letter to the neighboring inhabitants of the Quaker persuasion, in which he mentioned his being brought up a Quaker, and observed, that an opportunity offered for the exercise of their humanity, without confining themselves to either party, by taking care of the wounded, both British and Americans, who must otherwise perish. His recommendations and arguments prevailed, and the Quakers supplied the hospitals with all that was wanting till the sick and wounded recovered.

(Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 176.)

Whether so categorical or not there is this entry in the Diary of the Congregation of Salem under the date of March 18:³⁸

This morning a stranger reported that yesterday the continental army had been forced by the British to retreat.³⁹ At noon this was confirmed by an old man from the neighborhood, who had an open letter to "all friends of the country," signed by Mr. Ross, asking for a gift of old rags, meal and brandy, bandaging and feeding the wounded. We collected some rags and prepared to send them.

The stability of his militia force was another important concern of Greene. Many were leaving camp. Magill wrote to Governor Jefferson on the 19th: "I am sorry to inform your Excellency that a number of the Virginia Militia have sully'd the Laurels reap'd in the Action by making one frivolous pretense and another to return home. A number have left the Army very precipitately. The best Men from Augusta and Rockbridge have been the foremost on this occasion."⁴⁰ Greene himself wrote Jefferson a few days later that his need for more militia was an urgent one. "As the Militia of Virginia came out only for six Weeks their times will very shortly expire. I must request of your Excellency to order out 1500 more for three Months, to be sent from those Counties which are best able to arm and equip themselves. Their services will be immediately wanted." By one estimate, on the evening of the 17th, two days after the battle,

38. Fries, Records of the Moravians, 4, 1687.

39. Perhaps their first word of the battle was that from a deserter. This was in an entry for March 16: "A Hessian rifleman arrived. He had run away at the beginning of a battle, and did not know how it had ended, and he could only say that yesterday for three hours he heard firing after he left the army." (*Ibid.*)

40. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 183.

And on this, too, Samuel Houston in his "journal" had applicable remarks for the 17th: "On account of the want of some of our blankets, and some other clothing, many proposed returning home, which was talked of in general in M'Dowell's battalion, till at last they agreed and many went off; a few were remaining when General Lawson came and raged very much; and about ten o'clock all but M'Dowell came off. We marched twelve miles to the old Surry towns on the Dan where we encamped." (*Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 2nd ser., p. 145.*)

Greene's force stood at about 3500 (1350 continentals, 1500 militia,⁴² and 600 riflemen).⁴¹ And some of the militia would return.

Cornwallis moved away from Guilford and the battlefield on March 18, but Greene would not be able to put his own force in pursuit until two days later, March 20. A principal reason was "the want of ammunition, with which it was necessary first to supply himself."⁴³ As Caldwell summarized: "But Greene's military stores were so far expended, that he could not pursue until he had received a supply." Caldwell also concluded that "the delay thus occasioned, gave time to the British commander to effect his escape."⁴⁴

When it was evident that Cornwallis would not seek a renewal of the action, which Greene was ready to accept, the American commander became "determined to pursue the retiring foe and bring him to action before he could gain his point of Safety."⁴⁵ Seemingly Cornwallis' quick

41. Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 374.

Carrington estimated that at this time the Virginia regulars numbered 752 and the Marylanders stood at 550.

42. Battles of the Revolution, p. 564.

Gen. John Butler wrote to Jethro Sumner on April 11 from his "Camp at Ramsey's Mill" that: "We have now in the field 240 [North Carolina] men of those that fled from the battle on the 15th ulto: they are for one year and will in a few days join Headquarters. My orders were to inform you from time to time of their numbers in order that you might send on as many officers as were necessary to command them." (State Records of North Carolina, 15, 433-34.)

43. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 287.

44. Memoirs of Life of Greene, pp. 244-45.

Caldwell went further in speculating: "Had general Greene been in a position to pursue his lordship, as soon as he commenced his retreat, the destruction of that officer and his army would have been inevitable."

45. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 287.

withdrawal took Greene a little by surprise as he wrote: "But of a sudden they took their departure leaving behind them evident marks of distress." He wrote this March 23 and added: "Our army in good spirits, notwithstanding our suffering, and are advancing toward the enemy, who are retreating to Cross Creek."⁴⁶ Three days before, on March 20, Greene had informed Daniel Morgan, "The enemy are now retiring from us.... They are moving towards Bell's Mill. We shall follow them immediately, with the determination for another touch."⁴⁷

Likely Henry Lee was not far from the mark when he observed that initially "Confident, as was Greene, that his antagonist had suffered severely, he had not conceived his situation to be so impotent as it now appeared to be."⁴⁸ On March 16 Greene had written Jefferson that "except the honor of the field they have nothing to boast of. Our loss is very trifling, not more than 300 killed, wounded and taken; that of the Enemy's, from a variety of circumstances and the best intelligence I can get, to at least six hundred. Having encumbered them with a number of Wounded Men, I have nothing to lament but the loss of several valuable Officers, killed and wounded. Among the former is Major Anderson, and among the latter Genl. Stevens."⁴⁹ He would revise the figure for his own forces when he had word that a full thousand of the militia (both North Carolina and Virginia) had gone home.⁵⁰

Despite his own problems, the news and reports of the damage to the enemy gave Greene increasing confidence. He wrote Jefferson on the 23rd: "Every Hour serves to confirm the severity of the Action on the 15th and proves the calculations made of the Enemys loss to be rather under than over. Their precipitate retreat from Guilford and the leaving behind our Wounded at the Court House, and seventy of their own at New Garden settlement, are circumstances that bear strong marks of distress."⁵¹

46. Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 502.

47. Quoted in Graham, Daniel Morgan, p. 372.

48. Memoirs of the War, p. 287.

49. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 156.

On the 19th Charles Magill was able to give Governor Jefferson more word on the battle. "I have now the additional Satisfaction to inform your Excellency that the Enemys loss is much more considerable than at first expected. Their movements since have plainly evinced it. They have nothing but the ground to boast of, and that Cornwallis thought prudent to leave yesterday." (Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 182-83.)

50. Rankin, Rebels and Red Coats, p. 450.

51. This was written in retrospect on March 23. (Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 215.)

American army morale had quickly revived. St. George Tucker wrote three days after the battle: "Should Cornwallis attack us again I think he would purchase a second victory full as dearly as the first. Our troops are now somewhat used to the noise of guns, of which many had no idea before."⁵²

Then, too, there is the unidentified American soldier who wrote shortly after the battle: "You would, from the countenances of our men, believe they had been decidedly victorious. They are in the highest spirits, and appear most ardently to wish to engage the enemy again. The enemy are much embarrassed by their wounded."⁵³

And again Henry Lee drew a very pertinent conclusion:⁵⁴

The retreat of the British general evinced, unequivocally, his crippled condition. No consideration, but conviction of his inability to improve the victory he had gained, would have deterred a general less enterprising than Lord Cornwallis from giving full effect to the advantage his skill and courage had procured.

On the same day from Buffalo Creek, Greene got off another letter to the President of Congress: "On the 16th I wrote your Excellency giving an account of an action which happened at Guilford Courthouse the day before. I was then persuaded that, notwithstanding we were obliged to give up the ground, we had reaped the advantage of the action. Circumstances since confirm me in opinion that the enemy were too much galled to improve their success." (Quoted in Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 502.)

52. "The Southern Campaign: 1781," Mag. of Am. Hist. 7, 42.

53. C. Alphonso Smith, Clio: An Address Delivered at the Unveiling of a Monument to the Muse of History at Guilford Battle Ground, July 3, 1909 (1909), pp. 7-8, quoting a letter from the New Jersey Salem Gazette issue of April 11, 1781.

The writer pridefully continued: "When we consider the nakedness of our troops and of course their want of discipline, their numbers, and the loose, irregular manner in which we came into the field, I think we have done wonders. I rejoice at our success, and were our exertions and sacrifices published to the world as some commanding-officers would have published them, we should have received more applause than our modesty claims."

54. Memoirs of the War, p. 287.

CHAPTER IX

The Sequel

Cornwallis had all but decided on the abandonment of central North Carolina even before he left the Guilford battlefield. He wrote on the 17th that though he was moving toward "Bell's-Mill on Deep-River" the next day, where he hoped he would find friendly people who would work with him, it was his plan to approach "our shipping by easy marches, that we may procure the necessary Supplies for further operations, and lodge our sick and wounded where proper attention can be paid to them."¹

He wrote a bit more in detail of this, from Wilmington on April 10. He admitted he was largely unsuccessful at Deep Creek, "where the greatest number of our friends were supposed to reside. Many of the Inhabitants rode into Camp, shook me by the hand, said they were glad to see us and to hear that we had beat Greene, and then rode home again; for I could not get 100 men in all the Regulator's Country, to stay with us, even as militia."²

"A march of two days /had/ brought the army to Bell's Mill, where they continued two more, as well to afford rest to the troops, as to procure some scanty supply of provisions. The necessities of the army in general, and the distresses of the sick and wounded, left the marching towards Wilmington, in order to obtain those supplies and accomodations

1. Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 369.

Cornwallis wrote Clinton: "I therefore issued the enclosed proclamation, and having remained two days on the field of battle, marched to Bell's Mill on Deep Creek." (Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 508.)

Tarleton observed specifically that when Cornwallis, on the 18th, left Guilford he was headed for "Deep river, in the way to Cross creek." (Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 286.)

2. Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 396-97.

Cornwallis obviously painted the rosy picture to Clinton. Though he was not able then, for lack of time, to give him "a particular account of the Winter's Campaign, or the battle of Guilford" he could report: "I have however the satisfaction of informing you, that our military operations were uniformly successful; and the Victory of Guilford altho' one of the bloodiest of this War, was very complete." He also managed combat strength figures rather loosely, giving his own number as 1360

which were indispensably necessary to both, no longer a matter of choice."³

Though he could not follow Cornwallis immediately, as much as he desired it, Greene pushed out his light troops, Lee's Legion and Campbell's rifle corps, "to hang upon the rear" of the British. As Charles Magill reported it on the 19th, "Colo. Lees Legion have marche'd towards the Enemy to day. Should his Lordship retreat, by hanging upon his rear the British will be exceedingly gall'd."⁴

The American advance corps soon came up with the British army. Initially Cornwallis had been moving slowly with his army "with a view of cherishing its numerous wounded by the collection of every comfort which the country afforded as well as to avoid fatigue, which the debilitated state of the troops could not bear." As the light troops were spotted Cornwallis quickened his pace believing that the American army was not far behind and seeking battle, a situation he was now anxious to avoid. And indeed Greene did want to fight again.⁵

The American commander wrote to Henry Lee on the 21st that "I mean to fight the enemy again, and wish you to have your Legion and riflemen ready for action on the shortest notice. In the mean time you can attempt any thing which promises an advantage, put it in execution. Lord Cornwallis must be soundly beaten before he will relinquish his hold."⁶

infantry rank and file and "about 200 Cavalry" while the Americans "undoubtedly had seven thousand Men in the field" including "upwards of two thousand of which were eighteen-months men or Continentals." (Ibid., 2, p. 398.)

3. The Annual Register for 1781, p. 71.
4. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 182-83.
5. Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 287-88.
6. Letters of March 18 and 21 from Greene to Lee quoted in Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 287-88.

In his letter of the 18th Greene confided: "I am perfectly agreed with you in opinion, that to attack the enemy on their march will be best. I have written to Colonel Williams to that purpose."

He also asked Lee to forward him "the best intelligence you can get of the enemy's situation this morning, and whether they move or not." Greene himself was then on the move having "marched" his army from the area of the ironworks on the 20th. On the 21st, however, he still had things undone and his progress would be slower that day. "We have got provisions to draw, cartridges to make, and several other matters to attend to, which will oblige us to halt a little earlier than common."

On the march Greene had to contend with wet, muddy roads and bad weather, as well as with a not-too-productive or well-organized quartermaster department. The supply situation depended largely on the countryside. "Our difficulties in this line," Lee wrote, "were considerably increased, as the British army had proceeded us; and nothing but the gleanings of an exhausted country were left for our subsistence."⁷

Cornwallis himself quickened his pace. He reached Deep Creek on the 19th and after a little rest crossed the river, on the 21st, as if on the march to Salisbury. Actually, however, he moved downstream and recrossed Deep River, coming to a halt at "Ramsey's [Ramsour's] Mills."⁸

Tarleton details the story at this point:⁹

Some supplies of meal and flour being collected in the neighborhood of Bell's mill, the royal forces again crossed Deep river, that they might move through a country well supplied with forage on the road to Ramsey's mill. On this march the rear guard, which was now composed of the light infantry of the guards, the yagers, and the cavalry, under Lieutenant-colonel

7. Memoirs of the War, p. 289.

Stedman confirmed this: "So great was the avidity of the Americans to renew the conflict with Cornwallis, that notwithstanding the weather was very wet and the roads deep, they marched almost constantly without any regular supply of provisions." (The American War, 2, 389.)

8. Marshall, The Life of Washington, 4, 379 ff.; Carrington, Battles of the Revolution, p. 564.

9. Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 287.

Tarleton, obtained information that General Greene with his army had reached Buffaloe creek to the southward of Guildford court house: The day before the King's troops arrived at Ramsey's the Americans insulted the yagers in their encampment.¹⁰

The British "remained a few days at Ramsey's for the benefit of the wounded and to complete a bridge over Deep river" that would provide a source of quick exit. "And the light troops of the Americans again disturbed the pickets, and the army were ordered under arms."¹¹ Greene wrote that from the 23rd to the 27th "we have been in pursuit of the enemy with the determination to bring him to action again."¹²

On the 27th, we arrived at Rigden's ford twelve miles above this,¹³ and found the

10. This likely is the action that Cornwallis mentioned later in one of his reporting letters: "General Greene marched down as low as the mouth of Deep-River, where he remained four days ago; He never came within our reach after the action, nor has a shot been since fired, except at Ramsay's-Mill on Deep River, where Colonel Malmedy, with about 20 of a gang of plunderers that are attached to him, galloped in among the Sentries, and carried off three Yagers." (Steven, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 398.)

11. Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 287.

12. There were army operational matters too of detail such as that which impressed William Seymour on March 25: "On the twenty-fifth instant was tried and found guilty one Solomon Slocum, of the Second Maryland Battalion, for desertion to the enemy, joining with them, and coming in as a spy into our camp; when agreeable to his sentence he was hanged on a tree by the roadside in full view of all who passed by." ("A Journal of the Southern Expedition" in Hist. Soc. of Delaware, 2, (Paper XV), p. 22.)

13. Greene was writing on March 30 from "Colonel Ramsey's, Deep River", quoted in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 329; see also Joseph M. Morehead, The Battle of Guilford Court House, North Carolina: And the Preservation of that Historic Field, an address (Greensboro, N. C., 1909), p. 3.

enemy then lay at Ramsay's mill, from which it was imagined they meant to wait an attack; our baggage was accordingly left under the proper guard in our rear, and the army put in motion without loss of time; but we found the enemy had crossed some hours before our arrival, and with such precipitation that they left their dead unburied on the ground.

It was indeed a precipitate movement with the British destroying their just-completed bridge behind them.¹⁴ The haste is evident in the description Stedman gave:

On the morning of the 28th they [the Americans] arrived at Ramsay's mills on Deep River, a strong position which his lordship evacuated a few hours before, by crossing the river on a bridge erected for that purpose. Evident signs of precipitation were found in and about his lordships encampment. Several of the dead were left on the ground unburied. Beef in quarters was found in the slaughter-pen, on which the hungry continentals fed greedily; but that not being sufficient to allay their keen appetites, they eat [sic] without a murmur the garbage which was meant for the buzzards. Cornwallis had now fairly the start on Greene, and was in a situation to maintain his advantage. He was on the south side of Deep-River, with Cape-Fear on his left, and supplies for his army in front.¹⁵

Actually Cornwallis had no intention of standing at Ramsay's Mill; he wanted no action and was actually in retreat. He, as already noted, had made his tentative decision at Guilford firm during his pause at Bell's Mill.

14. Tarleton observed: "The halt of the King's troops at that place [Ramsey's] nearly occasioned an action, which would not probably have been advantageous to the royal forces, on account of the badness of the position, and the disheartening circumstances of their being encumbered with so many wounded officers and men since the action of Guildford."

15. The American War, 2, 389 ff.

With a third of my Army sick & wounded, which I was obliged to carry in Waggon, or on horseback, the remainder without Shoes, and worn down with fatigue, I thought it was time to look for some place of rest & refitment; I, therefore, by easy Marches, taking care to pass through all the Settlements, that had been described to me as most friendly, proceeded to Cross Creek.

But Cross Creek also proved dismal, "totally impossible", as did the Cape Fear River as a supply route.¹⁶ "Under the Circumstances I determined to move immediately to Wilmington."

The pursuit of Cornwallis by Greene was over at Ramsay's Mill. Greene wrote from that post: "Our men had suffered from want of provisions in this exhausted part of the country, that many of them fainted on their march, and the difficulty of procuring any immediate supply prevented our farther pursuit. The enemy are on the road to Cross Creek and Wilmington."¹⁷ And the British were of the same view. "Deep river, over which the rear guard broke the bridge, the want of provisions, and the desert country through which the King's troops now commenced their march impeded the immediate advance of General Greene, and Earl Cornwallis, without any material occurrence entered Cross Creek."¹⁸

16. Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 397; Willcox, The American Rebellion, p. 508.

"On my arrival there [Cross Creek], I found, to my great mortification, & contrary to all former accounts, that it was impossible to procure any considerable quantity of provisions, and that there was not four days forage within twenty miles. The Navigation of Cape Fear River, with the hopes of which I had been flattered, was totally impracticable, the distance from Wilmington by water being 150 miles, the breadth of the river seldom exceeding one hundred yards, the banks generally high, and the Inhabitants on each side, almost universally hostile."

17. Quoted in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 329.

18. Ibid., p. 287.

Henry Lee but echoed this in commenting that Cornwallis halted a few days at Ramsey's Mill "to review his humane exertions for the comfort of his wounded, and to collect, if possible, provisions; the country between this place and Cross Creek being sterile and sparsely settled." (Memoirs of the War, pp. 288-89.)

At Ramsey's Mill Greene reviewed his situation, now complicated by the fact that time was running out for much of the militia with him and many were leaving. After a few days he suddenly turned his force southward hoping to pull Cornwallis into the pine barrens of South Carolina and thereby give North Carolina a bit of respite. Cornwallis, however, did not react to this. If he really had any options at this time, the British general elected to continue his movement to Wilmington, which he reached early in April.¹⁹

Perhaps it is well to terminate this narrative now with a contemporary comment by the British on their Pyrrhic victory at Guilford Courthouse:

And such was the hard fate of the victors, who had gained so much glory at Guildford, as in the first place, to abandon a part of their wounded; and, in the second, to make a circuitous retreat of 200 miles, before they could find shelter or rest.²⁰

19. Scheer and Rankin, Rebels and Redcoats (Cleveland and New York, c. 1957), pp. 289-90; Roderick Mackenzie, Strictures on Lt. Col. Tarleton's History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America (London, 1787), p. 122.

20. Annual Register for 1781, pp. 71-72.

The author backgrounded this in more general terms:

Such was the strange and untoward nature of this war, that victory now, as we have already seen in more than one other instance, was productive of all the consequences of defeat. The news of this victory in England, for a while, produced the usual effects upon the minds of the people in general. A very little time and reflection gave rise to other thoughts; and a series of victories caused for the first time, the beginning of a general despair. The fact was, that while the British army astonished both the old and the new world, by the greatness of its exertions and the rapidity of its marches, it had never advanced any nearer even to the conquest of North Carolina.

(See also for similar thoughts Macksey, The War for America, pp. 406-07.)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Battle Losses

As Henry Lee pointed out the British losses on the battlefield were "very disproportionate" when compared to those of the Americans, and he offers a few plausible reasons:

The disproportion in loss on this day is readily to be accounted for. We had great advantage in the ground, and were sheltered in various points until the enemy approached very near; while he was uncovered, and exposed from his first step to his last. We had spent the previous day in ease, and the night in rest; he had been preparing during the day, and marching part of the night. We were acquainted with wood and tree fighting; he ignorant of both. And lastly, we were trained to take aim and fire low, he was not so trained; and from this course, or from the composition of his cartridge (too much powder for the lead), he always overshot.¹

1. American Losses:

The basic data on American losses at Guilford came from the reports of Ortho H. Williams, Deputy Adjutant General, which were compiled from unit reports which Greene had requested on the morning of the 16th and which he included in his letter of that date to Samuel Huntington, President of Congress.² In totals this included 79 killed and 185 wounded

1. Memoirs of the War, p. 285. He might have added too that the rifle, which a good many Americans had, in experienced hands was more effective than the musket and had greater range.

2. Given in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 326 ff. See, also, "Rebel Return of loss in the Action at Guilford Court house" in the Diary of Frederick Mackenzie Giving a Daily Narrative of His Military Service as an Officer of the Regiment of the Royal Welch Fusiliers During the Years 1775-1781 (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), 2, 502; State Records of North Carolina, 17, 995 et seq.; also see itemized totals in table below.

with 1,046 missing. Williams noted that the returns did not include artillery companies which were assumed to have had light casualties. As for the missing, he concluded: "Many of those missing are expected to return, or to be found at their homes."

Williams further noted that "I have received no return of one of the North Carolina regiments [of militia]. Those missing are supposed to have gone home.³ According to the reports of the general and field officers, very few were killed and taken, most of them having thrown away their arms, and abandoned the field early in the action." In the case of "The North Carolina Cavalry, Com'd by the Marquis of Bretigney [there was] lost one man killed and one wounded."

Evidently in this return, the wounded at the courthouse in the hands of the British would have been carried as missing. From all of this it is clear that some increase in the reported American killed and wounded is in order but the amount is open to interpretation. Likely it was not as much as 25% additional. In this event the killed and wounded figures would increase from the reported 79 and 185 respectively (264) to perhaps 100 and 300, totalling some 400. This closely approximates the killed and wounded as itemized by Henry Lee: 418.⁴

3. Westwood Armistead's unit was one of those that did not return home. Later, when he filed for a pension in 1844 at the age of 81, he recalled that he had been "drafted into the Army in 1781, a short time before the Guilford Battle...marched under Capt. Madrie to Guilford C. H.--was in the Guilford Battle--his whole company fled, but again rendezvoused at Troublesome Iron Works, and that he was then returned a soldier for 12 months under Anthony Armistead, his brother." State Records of North Carolina, 22, 106. There is a later entry on losses in the State Records of North Carolina (15, 431): "Judge D. Schenck adds in the following note on May 27, 1891: Lawson's Brigade had one man killed, Eaton's Brigade of N. C. Seven."

4. Lee gives the killed, wounded and missing of the Continentals as 14 officers and 312 rank and file and of the militia as 4 captains and 17 privates killed and 3 captains, 8 subalterns, and 60 privates wounded. Of the Continentals who were missing Lee, since few prisoners were taken, assumed they were likely killed. Of the many missing militia, he concluded that they most likely were "to be found safe at their own firesides." Memoirs of the War, p. 285.

American Losses at Guilford

	Virginia Regulars -Brigade	Maryland Regulars -Brigade	Delaware Battalion, Capt. Kirkwoods Company	Virginia Militia -1st Brigade (Stevens)	Virginia Militia -2nd Brigade (Lawson)	Rifle Regiments -Campbell and Lynch	Cavalry Detachments 1st & 3rd Regiments -Washington	Partizan Legion -Lee	North Carolina Cavalry Unit	North Carolina Militia	Total
KILLED											
Majors	1	1		2		2					1
Captains	2	1									5
Subalterns	3	2		9							3
Sergeants											5
Drums & Fifes											9
Rank & File	23	11	7	1	1	3	3	3	1	6	56
TOTAL	29	15	7	11	1	3	3	3	1	6	79
WOUNDED											
Brigr Genls	1		1	1							2
Majors		5		1	1						1
Captains			2	4	2	1	2	1		1	11
Subalterns						1	2			1	12
Sergeants											6
Drums & Fifes											153
Rank & File	35	36	11	30	13	13	4	7	1	3	
TOTAL	40	42	13	36	16	16	8	8	1	5	185
MISSING											
Brigr Genls											1
Majors											4
Captains											20
Subalterns											17
Sergeants											8
Drums & Fifes											552
Rank & File	39	88	13	133	83	78	3	7			996
TOTAL	39	97	15	141	87	94	3	7			563 1046
TOTALS	108	154	35	188	104	113	14	18	2	574	1310

Some additional notes:

1. Brigadier General Stevens "was wounded through the thigh."
2. Brigadier General Huger was "slightly wounded in the hand."
3. Among the officers killed were Major Anderson⁵ of the 1st Maryland Regiment.
4. Captain Barret of Washington's cavalry wounded.
5. Captain Griffin Fauntleroy "of the same Cavalry shot through the thigh and left in the field."⁶
6. Captain Hoffman of Washington's infantry, wounded.
7. Captain Andrew Wallace of the Virginia Line, killed.⁷

2. British Losses:

British troop losses at Guilford were heavy, crippling in total and ultimate effect, reaching more than 25%, perhaps approaching a third, of the force on the field on March 15.⁸ The official tally (certainly the very minimal figure) given in Cornwallis's return was 532 officers and rank and file soldiers. Most importantly, however, it involved 29 officers, of whom five were killed on the field and five more died of wounds in succeeding days.⁹ Among the wounded who healed were

5. Lee noted him as a man "much esteemed and highly regretted." Memoirs of the War, p. 285.

6. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 198-99.

7. This from the account of William Seymour. "An Account of the Southern Expedition," Papers of the Hist. Soc. of Delaware, 2 (Paper XV), 9.

8. As noted in the Annual Register for 1781 (p. 69): "The loss on the British side, in any comparative estimate, drawn from the length, circumstances, and severity of the action, would appear very moderate; but if considered, either with respect to the number of the army, its ability to bear the loss, or the intrinsic value of the brave men who fell or were disabled, it was great indeed. In the whole it exceeded 500 men; of whom though scarcely a fifth were killed on the spot, many died afterwards of their wounds; and undoubtedly, a much greater number were disabled from all future service. At any rate, the army was deprived of about one-fourth in number (and that by no means the least effective) of its present force."

9. It was reported that Cornwallis's officer loss among the Guards was particularly severe: "the two battalions of the Guards Brigade had only a captain and five subalterns fit for duty." Piers Macksey, The War for America, 1775-1783 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), quoting from a manuscript letter of April 20 from O'Hara to the Duke of Gloucester in the Duke University Collection (XVIII-F).

two brigadier generals, a lieutenant-colonel, and five captains. Besides, sergeant ranks were seriously thinned. Thirteen were killed, 15 were wounded, and one was reported as missing. In total for the British it was 93 killed in the field and 413 wounded with 26 missing as shown in more detail in the table that follows. Despite these official figures Greene in a letter penned some two weeks after the battle gave the British losses as a precise 633 though he did not note the source of his data. "From undoubted information we learn, that the enemy's loss in the battle of Guilford amounted to six hundred and thirty-three, exclusive of officers, and most of their principal officers were either killed or wounded."¹⁰

All of the regular British units had substantial losses. They ranged from 45% for the Guards to 25% for the Bose Regiment. For the 23rd Regiment it was 29%, for the 33rd some 31%, and for the 71st a sizeable 26%. The fighting was intense all over. Though the 2nd Battalion of Guards in the center obviously must have had much the highest casualty rate, it is equally clear that a sizeable number of their casualties came in the detached fighting of the 1st Battalion on the British right where the Bose Regiment also was positioned. There is no breakdown of losses by battalion for the Guards. The 33rd had its losses (almost a third of its strength) moving up on the British left flank while the 23rd and 71st took their losses in going up the center through the militia lines.

10. Letter of March 30 written at Ramsey's quoted in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 329. See also G. W. Greene, Life of Nathanael Greene, 2, 204, note. As for prisoners, evidently few were taken on either side. Greene wrote: "The enemy left seventy of our wounded, who had fallen into their hands in the action of the 15th, behind them; except these, they have taken but few prisoners; not so many as we took of theirs, notwithstanding they kept the ground." He also noted that "Since we re-crossed the Dan river, we have taken at different times upwards of one hundred and twenty British prisoners, and several officers." Even as the battle was fought Greene was in communication with Cornwallis relative to prisoner exchange.

Report of Losses of British Army

in the Guilford Battle¹¹

Regt. or Corps	Killed					Wounded					Missing						
	Lt. Cols.	Lieutenants	Ensigns	Sergeants	Ranks & File	Brig. Gens.	Lt. Cols.	Capt.	Lieuts.	Ensigns	Staff	Sergeants	Drummers	Rank & File	Sergeants	Rank & File	Total
Royal Artillery	1	1			1									4			6
Brigade of Guards																	
23rd		1		8	28	2		6		1	1	2	2	143		22	216
33rd																	
71st			1	1	12									53			68
Bose Yagers			1	1	9									55			74
British Legion			1	1	11									46			63
Total	1	2	2	13	75	2	2	9	4	5	2	15	5	369	1	25	532

11. From photostat of original in William L. Clements library in files of Guilford Courthouse NMP. This is also reproduced in slightly different form in Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 (pp. 318-20), being an enclosure in Cornwallis's Dispatch No. 8 to Germain from Guilford on March 17. Bracketed material in the "Officer Names of Killed and Wounded" which follows is from a list in Mackenzie, Daily Narrative of His Military Service, 2, 502. Asterisked names are other spellings from Stedman, The American War, 2, 383.

Officer Names of Killed and Wounded
in Above Return

<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>
Royal Artillery Lt. O'Hara ¹²	
Brigade of Guards Lt. Col. Stuart	Brig. Gen. O'Hara <u>[thigh and breast]</u>
	Brig. Gen. Howard <u>[foot]</u>
	Captains Swanton
	" Schultz (Since Dead) ¹³
	" Maynard ¹⁴ (Since Dead) <u>[Arm]</u>
	" Goodricke (Since Dead)
	" Ld. <u>[Lord]</u> Douglas, L <u>[Dunglass]*</u>
	" Maitland
	Ensign Stuart <u>[Dangerously]</u>
	Adjut. Colquhoun <u>[Colquhoune]</u>

12. He was the "brother of the brigadier," Brigadier General O'Hara Stedman. The American War, 2, 383.

13. Lamb commented that "During these toilsome movements [to Wilmington], the British army sustained an almost irreparable loss, by the deaths of Colonel Webster of the 33rd, Captains Schultz and Maynard of the guards, and captain Wilmouski and ensign De Trott of the regiment of Bose. They all received their mortal wounds at Guilford Court House." Lamb, Occurrences During the Late American War, p. 360.

14. It is said that Maynard, naturally of jovial disposition and "great hilarity," who had fought well in several actions in the war, on the 15th had "certain presentiment of his fate that day." As the battle line formed "he became gloomy, and gave way to despondency." Even Colonel Norton, his commanding officer, could not cheer him. Early in the action he received a leg wound and shortly afterwards another shot went through his lungs. As reported by Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War, pp. 284-85, note; it is also reported in Stedman, The American War, 2, 384, note.

	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>
23rd	2nd Lt. Robinson	Capt. Peter <u>[leg]</u>
33rd	Ensign Talbert, Talbot*	Lt. Col Webster ¹⁵ (Since Dead)
		Lt. Sanin <u>[Salvin]</u>
		Lt. Wynyard (Winyard)
		Ensign Gore <u>[collar bone]</u>
		" Hughes
		[" Kelly <u>[leg]</u>
		Adjut. Fox <u>[collar bone]</u>
71st. 2nd Bat. Ensign Grant Regt. of Bose		Capt. (Peter)* Wilmousky (Since Dead)
Br. Legion		Capt. Eichinbrodt <u>[Eigenbrodt]</u> , Eichenbrodt*
		Lt. Schwener <u>[Schwaner]</u>
		Lt. Goise <u>[Geise]</u> Graise*
		Lt. DeTrott <u>[DeFrott]</u> , DeTroot* (Since Dead)
		Lt. Col. Tarleton <u>[lost 2 fingers, right hand]</u>

Returned by J. Despard, Deput Adj't. Genl

15. When Cornwallis learned of his death he is reported to have said "I have lost my scabbard." In a letter to his minister-father, Cornwallis wrote: "You have for your satisfaction, that your son fell nobly, in the cause of his country, honored and lamented by all his fellow soldiers." Lamb, Occurrences During the Late American War, p. 360. It was noted in the Annual Register for 1781 (p. 70): "Col. Webster, a brave experienced, and distinguished officer, who commanded the brigade on the left, died of his wounds, to the no small loss of the service, and the very great regret of the general as well as the army."

APPENDIX B

The Two Armies at Guilford

A good deal has been written about the size of the two armies that fought at Guilford and the precise nature of their makeup. Reports vary.¹ However, it seems that Greene that day mustered upwards from 4,400 and that Cornwallis had some 2,200 of which he put about 2,000 on the field. It is not known how many Greene left with the baggage at Troublesome Creek. The British, long on training, discipline, and experience, were, however, outnumbered certainly more than two to one.

The American Army:

When Nathanael Greene moved onto the field at Guilford on March 14, 1781, to offer battle, his army was larger than it had been at any time, and larger than it would be again. Its precise total strength is difficult to fix, yet a good many of the specifics are known, particularly in regard to the regular troops. Overall estimates generally range upward from 4,400. Of these some 1,700 were regulars, or Continentals, embracing two Maryland regiments with a fragment of the old Delaware regiment (630), two Virginia regiments (778), Lee's Legion (157), Washington's Partizans (86) and a detachment of artillery (60).

By far the greater number was made up of militia, there being upwards of 2,200 plus rifle corps and related volunteer companies certainly reaching 500 in number. These included two brigades of North Carolina militia (perhaps exceeding 500 men each) and two from Virginia (about 600 each). There were two participating grouped corps of riflemen, one under Col. Charles Lynch and the other under Col. William Campbell, plus a variety of volunteer, or independent, units. The estimates for the latter fluctuate a good deal in the absence of specific returns.

1. The evaluation of figures, as given in the Annual Register for 1781 (pp. 66-67), seems pertinent at this point: "It is probable that Greene's whole force did not fall much, if any thing, short of 6,000 men; and it seems as probable, from the long service they had gone through, and the consequent thinness of the battalions as well as from other preceding and subsequent circumstances, that Lord Cornwallis's forces could scarcely exceed a third of that number. The accounts published at the time, on either side, being always calculated to make certain impressions, and to answer immediate purposes, can never afford a clue to accurate estimates in such cases."

In summary it was:

Continents	1,700
Militia	2,200
Rifle Corps and Volunteer (Independent) Units	500
	4,400

2. William Gordon, Establishment of the Independence of United States (3, 173), places the total at 4,444; F. V. Greene, General Greene (p. 213), estimates 4,444; Christopher Ward, Delaware Continentals (p. 409), tallies 4,463; Henry B. Carrington, Battles of the Revolution (p. 556), gives, perhaps, the most realistic figure of all of 4,404; and David Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-1781 (p. 312), raises it to over 5,668:

	<u>Gordon</u>	<u>Greene</u>	<u>Ward</u>	<u>Carrington</u>	<u>Schenck</u>
<u>Regular Army</u>		1,651			1,715
Infantry	1,490		1,490	1,490	
Cavalry	161		160	161	
Artillery			60		
<u>Militia</u>					
Virginia	1,693	1,693	1,200	1,123	2,253
North Carolina	1,060	1,060	1,000	1,060	1,700
<u>Volunteer Infantry</u>			553		
Other	40	40	—	570	—
	4,444	4,444	4,463	4,404	5,668

Schenck even considered his 5,668 total a low one, commenting: "In my opinion, this is probably under the true figure, [rather] than over it, as there were so many irregular troops coming and going, that it is impossible to locate them at any one place." In the writer's view, Schenck, in his effort to cover everything and to have a figure for every unit (especially North Carolina groups), almost surely came up with inflated totals.

It is noted in Henry Lee's Memoirs of the War that: "Our field return, a few days before the action, rates Greene's army at four thousand four hundred and forty-nine, horse, foot, and artillery; of which, one thousand six hundred and seventy were Continentals; the residue militia. The enemy rated us at upwards of five thousand. He is mistaken: we did not reach that number, though some call us seven thousand." He also points out that Greene had only about 500 rank and file soldiers who were truly "veteran infantry": "the first regiment of Maryland, the company of Delawares, under Kirkwood (to whom none could be superior), and the Legion infantry." Lee continued: "The second regiment of Maryland and the two regiments of Virginia were composed of raw troops; but their officers were veteran, and the soldier is soon made fit for battle by experienced commanders. Uniting these corps to those recited, and the total (as per official return) amounted to one thousand four hundred and ninety; so that even estimating our old and new troops in one class, still our infantry was considerably less than his lordship's."³ Lee thought the two armies about equal in artillery and in cavalry. In the latter instance, however, the British had "superiority in number" while the Americans had more "excellence in quality."

3. Pages 283-84. Lee estimated Cornwallis's strength at 1,449 infantry, cavalry about 300, and artillery about 200, bringing the force to nearly 2,000, "probably the real number at Guilford Court House." This was besides Hamilton's regiment, a hundred infantry, and 20 dragoons sent back with the baggage. Altogether he credited Cornwallis with 2,400, several hundred more than he seemingly had.

Unit, or Organization, Tabulation⁴

I. Continents

A. Maryland Brigade:

This brigade included two regiments, the 1st and 2nd Maryland, commanded by Col. Ortho H. Williams. Its strength at Guilford was some 630.

1. The 1st Maryland was the most experienced and battle proven in Greene's command. Having served with Washington in New Jersey, it came south under De Kalb in May 1780 after Charleston fell. At Camden it bore the rush of the British and was the sole unit there to retreat as an organized force. It was the unit, too, at Cowpens, that charged and routed the British regulars.

At Guilford the 1st Maryland was commanded by Col. John Gunby seconded by Lt. Col. John Eager Howard.

2. The 2nd Maryland was untested in battle, being made up almost entirely of new levies who had lately joined the army though its officers were in the main seasoned and experienced. Its commanding officer was Col. Benjamin Ford.

3. The Delaware Continentals at Guilford were "the remnant brought off from Gates defeat at Camden." These numbered some 80 men and were formed into two companies, that of Capt. Robert H. Kirkwood, who formed a part of the American right flank, and that of Capt. Peter Jaquett, who fought as an element with the Marylanders in the third line. In the battle this small unit absorbed a high percentage of casualties, seven killed, 11 wounded, and 15 missing at the time of the return on March 16, or a total of 35. Of this total "the old Delaware company, under the brave Captain Kirkwood" lost three killed and six wounded. Presumably the other loss was in Jaquett's Company.⁵

4. This outline draws heavily on the work of David Schenck, Christopher Ward, F. V. Greene, and Henry B. Carrington cited above and on John Marshall, The Life of Washington, 4.

5. Ward, Delaware Continentals, pp. 409-20. William Seymour, one of the Delawares, wrote that 27 of "Kirkwoods corps" were killed or wounded, though his accuracy on such details is not always of the best.

B. Virginia Brigade:

Like the Maryland Brigade this too had two regiments. It had an aggregate strength of 778 and was under the command of Brig. Gen. Isaac Huger of South Carolina. Though this brigade had fought under Greene in various Pennsylvania battles, its veterans after three years of service had been discharged, and new recruits now filled the ranks. One of Huger's aides, Charles Magill, wrote that in the battle "the whole of my attention being confined to that line. The Virginia Regulars with a sufficient number of Officers would have done honor to themselves, that deficiency frequently created confusion."⁶

1. One Virginia Regiment was under the command of Col. John Greene who with Washington's cavalry covered the army's retreat.
2. The second Virginia Regiment was under the command of Lt. Col. Samuel Hawes. He took over the regiment from Huger when the latter took command of the brigade.

C. The Cavalry:

There were two American cavalry units on the field and both were "crack units" made up of picked veterans with long experience. They were excellent troops under able officers.

1. The Partizans were under the command of Lt. Col. William Washington. They represented detachments from the 1st and 3rd regiments and were formed into two companies. They numbered 86.
2. The Legion was commanded by Lt. Col. Henry Lee and was formed of one company of cavalry and a battalion of infantry, numbering together some 157 men (75 and 82 respectively).

D. The Artillery:

The American artillery at Guilford consisted of two detachments of two 6-pounder cannon⁷ each under Cpts. Anthony Singleton⁸ and Samuel Finley with 60 artillerymen ("matrosses"). They were attached to the Virginia and Maryland brigades respectively.

6. Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 162-63.

7. William Gordon related that two of the cannon at Guilford had been captured from the British at Cowpens. Earlier they had been taken from the British at Saratoga and reclaimed by them at Camden. Establishment of the Independence of the United States, 3, 162.

8. Jefferson wrote of "Capt. Singleton [as] an intelligent Officer of Harrison's Artillery who was in the Action" at Guilford and brought him word of the battle.

II. Militia Forces

A. Brigades:

1. Virginia

This expected militia had reached Greene on March 11. For the most part it was organized into two brigades (each with about 600 men) and placed to form the Second American Line. For the most part these were fresh levies for a short term, having had little discipline or experience. There were, however, quite a number among them who had earlier served their time in the Continental Line and were now back as substitutes, or drafted men.

a. One Brigade was commanded by Brig. Gen. Edward Stevens.

b. The second Virginia Brigade was commanded by Brig. Gen. Robert Lawson. Among the officers here were Colonels Holcombe and Mumford, and Lt. Col. St. George Tucker.⁹

2. North Carolina

The North Carolina militia was largely made up of just-recruited new levies and most had had little experience or discipline. It, like that from Virginia, was grouped into brigades.

a. One brigade was commanded by Brig. Gen. John Butler, an old "Regulator" of Orange County. His men were chiefly from Orange, Granville, and Guilford counties.

b. A second brigade was under the command of Brig. Gen. Thomas Eaton, an officer with a long record of Revolutionary War service.

9. Tucker, "The Southern Campaign: 1781," Mag. of Am. History, 7, 40-42.

III. Rifle Corps, Volunteer (Independent) Companies, Irregulars, etc.

A. Virginia:

There were a number of irregular forces from Virginia in units of various sizes.

1. Col. William Campbell's rifle regiment had, perhaps, 100 men.¹⁰
2. There was the command of Col. Charles Lynch numbering some 150.¹¹
3. There was the unit of militia dragoons from Prince Edward County led by Capt. Thomas Watkins. The corps numbered about 50 and Watkins was seconded by Lts. Philemon Holcomb, Charles Scott, and Samuel Venable. Peter Francisco served in this unit.¹²
4. There was Col. William Preston's command of "hardy mountaineers," which is said to have been one of the larger units, estimated as high as 300 men.¹³
5. Arthur Campbell's small company of 60 men.
6. Hugh Crocket is said to have had 160 with him.

10. Lee wrote that militia under Colonel Campbell, "one of the heroes of King's Mountain," had joined Greene early in March relieving "Pickens and the corps" who had served so well. Memoirs of the War, p. 265.

11. Lynch had arrived on March 11 with his battalion of militia volunteers and riflemen. It is from Charles Lynch that the term "lynch law" derives to describe "the summary punishment of violent and desperate criminals." Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 309.

12. These troops participated in Washington's attack into the Guards and helped to cover in the retreat.

13. Lee, Memoirs of the War, p. 260.

B. North Carolina volunteer and other units:¹⁴

1. A corps led by Col. James Reed.
2. Maj. Joseph Winston's command.¹⁵
3. Major Armstrong's detachment.¹⁶
4. Capt. Arthur Forbis's Company.¹⁷
5. Sevier's men under Robertson.
6. Col. James Martin's corps.¹⁸

14. In an exhaustive effort, David Schenck, with some logic, builds a case for a number of North Carolina volunteer units being at Guilford and in the action, or in the area. These were in addition to the regular militia that joined Greene at High Rock Ford. He surmises that: "The aggregate of the North Carolina troops who were in the battle of Guildford Court-House was, approximately, 1700 of all arms." This, an excessively high figure, is not generally accepted. He arrives at it thus: 500 in each of two brigades and 700 in special units. The latter is his total of his Read's 200, Winston's 100, Armstrong's 100, Forbis's 100, Robertson's 100 and Martin's 100. North Carolina, 1780-81, pp. 302-06.

15. Francis B. Heitman notes that Winston fought at Kings Mountain but makes no mention of Guilford Courthouse. Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution (reissue of the 1932 edition, Boston, 1967), p. 601.

16. Schenck wrote that Majors Winston and Armstrong had reinforced Pickens's command on February 25. North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 300.

17. Schenck reports this group at about 100; however, Caruthers writes that Forbis's daughter recounted to him that Forbis several days before the battle called his company of 50 up and gave its men the option of going, or staying, and about half (25) volunteered to go. Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd Ser., p. 137.

18. He had joined Greene at Guilford Courthouse on February 10 (Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 301).

7. There was a company of North Carolina militia cavalry led by the Marquis of Bretigney (Bretagne) who held the rank of major. His unit (about 40 men) was listed in the casualty reports with one killed and another wounded.¹⁹

The British Army

Certainly any discussion of the British strength at Guilford on March 15, 1781, has to begin, and likely end, with official army reports. It can, however, be safely assumed that these represent minimum figures. These are in the tables which follow. Cornwallis committed something less than 2,000 "in the Action at Guilford." He itemized 1,924. Of this total some 85% were "Rank and File" soldiers, the remaining 15% being commissioned officers, sergeants, and drummers. His total force at the time evidently numbered about 2,300.²⁰

19. Not all of the local units operating in the vicinity of Guilford Courthouse were engaged in the battle. There was, for example, the mounted corps of the French Colonel Marquis de Malmedy and Maj. Pleasant Henderson. John Taylor, Sr., who was elected captain of a company of mounted volunteers from his neighborhood which joined Malmedy, later reported: "After joining Colonel Malmedy and within seven miles of Guilford C. H., while at breakfast, they heard the report of artillery in the battle, which started them to reach the battle ground by a short cut through the woods, but the route was so rocky and uneven, they abandoned it and returned to the more circuitous road, meeting hundreds flying from the conflict, from whom no information could be obtained as to the location or the issue of the engagement. Colonel Malmedy reached the battle ground and found it in the possession of the enemy, with their guns stacked around their fires." State Records of North Carolina, 22, 156.

20. Those not committed were Hamilton's Regiment of loyalists (perhaps 250 when the rank and file strength is adjusted), 100 infantry, and 20 dragoons, all sent back to guard and secure the baggage. It is interesting to note that Cornwallis's rank and file return for March 1 was 2,213, or 2,545 when adjusted to include officers, sergeants, and such. On April 1 it was 1,723, or 1,981 when adjusted. The difference in these adjusted totals is 564. Allowing for some losses prior to the battle, this is very close to his reported 532 battle casualties.

Official returns would indicate that aside from Tarleton's Legion there were no loyalist (provincial) recruits in the Guilford action as Hamilton's "Volunteers" had been detailed with the baggage. This, however, might not preclude some loyalists being on the field. The British did recruit some loyalists when in the Hillsboro area and this seems not to have been reflected in the strength of Hamilton's Regiment. This unit had a rank and file total of 224 on April 1, about the same strength it had on March 1, when it was given as 232. This is less than it was reported on February 1 when it had but 287. Perhaps there is an element of logic in Caruthers's speculation that the British had a variety of loyalists in the battle with them though "only the regular army is reported; and, for prudential reasons, there was no public notice of the loyalists."²¹ If so the record is silent.

British Strength on the Eve of Battle

Field Return of the Troops under the Command of Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis in the Action at Guilford 15th March 1781:²²

Regiments of Corps:

	Colonels or Brigr. Generals	Lt. Colonels	Majors	Captains	Lieutenants	Ensigns	Staff	Sergeants	Drummers	Rank & File	Total
Royal Artillery					3			7		40	50
Brigade of Guards	2	3		9	8	1	4	27	13	422	481
23rd Regiment				3	4		1	12	2	212	238
33rd Regiment		1		3	6	4	1	8		213	234
71st Regiment				3	4	5	1	25	10	194	244
Regiment of Bose			1	4	2		1	35	18	256	321
Yagers				1	1			1	3	78	84
British Legion		1		6	8	3	6	20	5	223	272
Total	2	5	1	29	34	15	14	135	51	1638	1924

21. Interesting Revolutionary Incidents, 2nd ser., p. 127.

22. From photostat of original in the William L. Clements Library in files of Guilford Courthouse NMP.

Comparative Strengths of British
Army from Four Monthly Returns

State of the Troops that Marched With the Army Under the Command of
Lieutenant-General Earl Cornwallis.²³

Rank and File Present, and Fit, for Duty

Date	Brigade of Guards	7th Regiment	16th Regiment, 3 Companies	British			Germans			Provincial		Total	
1781				23rd Regiment	33rd Regiment	71st Regiment, 1st Batt.	71st Regiment, 2nd Batt.	71st Regiment, Light Co.	Regiment of Bose	Yagers	British Legion, etc., etc.	North Carolina Volunteers	
Jan. 15	690	167	41	286	328	249	237	69	347	103	451	256	3224
Feb. 1	690			279	334		234		345	97	174	287	2440
Mar. 1	605			258	322		212		313	97	174	232	2213
Apr. 1	411			182	229		161		245	97	174	224	1723

23. From The State Records of North Carolina, 17 (Goldsboro, 1899), p. 1,009;
see also Stevens, Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy, 2, 376.

British Organizational Units

In the main the British troops were all seasoned veterans in well-established regiments, or corps. "The quality of these troops was of the very best. Most of them had been in America since 1776 and had fought at the battles around New York and Philadelphia, at Charleston and at Camden."²⁴

I. British Units

A. Infantry:

1. The Brigade of Guards was the largest unit in Cornwallis's command with a battle strength totalling 481. It was composed of two battalions (the 1st and 2nd), a grenadier company, and some light infantry.
 - a. The First Battalion was commanded by Lt. Col. Norton.
 - b. In the battle the 2nd Battalion, with the grenadier company, was directed by the brigade's commander, Brig. Gen. Charles O'Hara. Lt. Col. Robert Stuart was in command of the 2nd Battalion when it hit the American Third Line.
2. The 71st Regiment with a battle strength of 244 was known as the "King's own Borderers," or "Fraser's Highlanders," being a Scottish regiment of highlanders. It appears that this regiment had been newly organized late in 1775 especially for service in America and they wore "green plaid pants, close fitting red vests and high caps."²⁵ The regiment had consisted of two battalions, but the 1st Battalion had been taken by Morgan at Cowpens.
3. The 23rd Regiment, or the Royal Welch Fusiliers, was the regiment of the Prince of Wales and carried the motto Ich dien (I serve). Its colonel in 1775 had been Sir William Howe. Its battle strength was given as 238.
4. The 33rd Regiment (battle strength of 234) was an old established unit and had been Cornwallis's regiment. He had become its colonel in 1766. Its officers now were Lt. Col. James Webster (who moved up to command the brigade that formed the British left wing) and Maj. William Dansey. Capt Frederick Cornwallis commanded one of its companies.

24. F. V. Greene, General Greene, p. 312.

25. Schenck, North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 330

B. Artillery:

The army artillery detachment was comprised some 50 men with four guns. It was commanded by Lt. John MacLeod, seconded by Lt. O'Hara, who was killed in the opening cannonade.

II. German Units

A. The Regiment of Bose (numbering 321 men at battle time) was a Hessian unit under the command of Lt. Col. Johann Christian Du Buy.²⁶ It was brigaded with the 71st on the British right with Maj. Gen. Alexander Leslie in brigade command.

B. A Battalion of Yagers (jägers, jaegers), German riflemen, numbering 84.

III. Provincial Forces

A. There was a single regiment of North Carolina "Volunteers," this commanded by Lt. Col. John Hamilton. It likely numbered about 250 at battle time.

B. The British Legion, the only cavalry with Cornwallis, was under the command of Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton. David Schenck's conclusion was that Tarleton "had seriously injured its esprit de corps, by recruiting its rank from Tories."²⁷ Its battle-time strength was given as 272.

26. He is given as Lt. Col. Johann Christian du Buy, commanding the Regiment von Bose at Guilford Courthouse, by Edward J. Lowell in The Hessians and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War (New York, 1884), pp. 269, 320.

27. North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 315.

APPENDIX C

In One Sector With the Virginia Militia

With the battle over, Lt. Col. St. George Tucker undertook to describe it to his wife in a letter of March 18 from "Laura Town" where he was resting and recuperating from his leg wound.¹ He quite candidly admitted that he at the time of battle could not see, or comprehend, the activity except in the area of his own command² "in Lawson's brigade [which] composed a line near the centre of which my post was." He continued:

A cannonade of half an hour ushered in the battle. Our friend Skipwith was posted in the express direction of the shot, and, with his battalion, maintained his post during a most tremendous fire with a firmness which does him much honor. Col. [John] Holcombe's regiment was on the right of him and on my left, so that I was in perfect security during the whole time, except from a few shot which came in my direction. Beverly was still further on the right. When the cannonade ceased, orders were given for Holcombes regiment and the regiment on the right of him to advance and annoy the enemy's left flank. While we were advancing to execute this order, the British had advanced, and having turned the flank of Col. Mumford's regiment--in which Skipwith commanded as a major, we discovered them in our rear. This threw the militia into such confusion, that, without attending in the least to their officers who endeavored to halt them, and make them face about and engage the enemy, Holcombe's regiment and ours instantly broke off without firing a single gun, and dispersed like a flock of sheep frightened

1. This is based on "The Southern Campaign: 1781: From Guilford Court House to the Siege of York: Narrated in the letters from Judge St. George Tucker to His Wife," The Magazine of American History, 7 (1881), pp. 40-42.

2. "...for during the whole of the battle I knew nothing of what passed in any quarter than on the ground where our regiment was engaged."

by dogs.³ With infinite labor Beverley and himself rallied about sixty or seventy of our men, and brought them to charge. Holcombe was not so successful. He could not rally a man though assisted by John Woodson, who acted very gallantly. With the few men which we had collected, we at several times sustained an irregular kind of skirmishing with the British, and were once successful enough to drive a party for a very small distance.⁴ On the ground we passed over I think I saw about eight or ten men killed and wounded. During the battle I was forced to ride over a British officer lying at the foot of a tree. One of our soldiers gave him a dram as he was expiring and bade him die like a brave man. How different this conduct from that of the barbarians he had commanded!

In attempting to rally a party of regular troops I received a wound in the small of my leg from a soldier, who, either from design or accident held his bayonet in such a direction that I could not possibly avoid it as I rode up to stop him from running away. The bayonet penetrated about an inch and a half between the bones in my leg. I felt no inconvenience from it for some hours, but have since been obliged to hobble with the assistance of a stick, or with some one to lead me. After this our militia joined the Virginia regulars under Col. Campbell, and sustained a good smart fire for some minutes. We were soon ordered to retreat.

3. "I believe the rest of the Virginia militia behaved better than Holcombe's regiment and ours. The surprise at finding the enemy in their rear I believe contributed to the disgraceful manner in which they fled at first. But it is not a little to the honor of those who rallied that they fired away fifteen or eighteen rounds--and some twenty rounds--a man, after being put into such disorder."

4. "The Virginia militia had the honor to receive Gen. Greene's thanks for their conduct. Some were undoubtedly entitled to them, while others ought to blush that they were undeservedly included in the number of those who were supposed to have behaved well. Capt. Ballew, Capt. Ogilvy, Capt. Overstreet, Lieut. Mosely, Lieut. Anderson, Lieut. Magnit, Ensign Sam Williams, and some others of our regiment...are among the number of those to whom the compliment from the general was most justly due."

APPENDIX D

Some Selected Comment on the Battle of Guilford

John R. Alden:

1. Cornwallis had won since he compelled Greene to seek safety in flight and held the field. He was a technical victor only. Almost half of his Guards were killed or wounded and the total of his injured and slain reached 532, about 28% of his army.

It was impossible for Cornwallis to resume the offensive. Another such victory would mean the end of this army. Nor could he stay where he was without supplies, without some communication to the southward, without hope of early reinforcement.

The South in the Revolution, p. 259.

2. It was now apparent even to that bold soldier that his triumphs in the Carolinas were empty. He could not safely remain in the interior of North Carolina; his depleted army was too weak even to risk defensive warfare there. He must now move elsewhere, and he did, not toward Camden and Charleston, but rather to Wilmington. Unmolested by Greene, he reached that port and thence marched off to Virginia and a meeting with destiny at Yorktown.

The American Revolution, p. 238.

Charles Caldwell:

1. Writing of both Greene's and Cornwallis's desire for battle: A similar desposition prevailing on both sides, a trial of arms could not be remote. It occurred, at Guilford court-house on the 15th of the month; and was one of the most obstinate, sanguinary, and splendid affairs, that marked the course of the revolutionary war.
2. In its effects on the enemy, this battle was murderous; nearly one third of them including many officers of distinction, being killed and wounded.

The result of this conflict, although technically a defeat, was virtually a victory, on the part of General Greene...enabling him, immediately afterwards, instead of retreating, to become the pursuing party.

But his lordship was in no position to pursue; nor, brave and enterprising, as was his character, had he the slightest desire for another conflict.

Memoirs of the Life of Greene,
pp. 224, 241.

Sir Henry Clinton:

1. His Lordship has lost an army, lost the object for which he moved it, and buried himself on the seacoast of North Carolina.

Quoted in Burke Davis, The Campaign That Won America: The Story of Yorktown (New York, 1970), p. 156.

2. No body can give Cornwallis more credit for his zealous exertions at the battle of Guilford Court House than Sir H. Clinton; but, alas! that victory had every consequence of a defeat.

Clinton, Observations on Mr. Stedman's History of the American War (London, 1794), p. 17.

Fred J. Cook:

Cornwallis, technically the victor, rested on the field that had witnessed the virtual destruction of his army as a fighting force. He had suffered losses he could not afford to suffer; he had paid so high a price for victory that never again could be dominate the south. Ahead lay the last long march into Virginia--and Yorktown.

"Francisco the Incredible" in American Heritage, 10, No. 6, 94.

Henry B. Dawson:

No battle in the war was more honorable to the British troops, yet none was less productive to the Royal cause...the only advantage Lord Cornwallis secured was the field of battle.

Battles of the United States, p. 670.

William Henry Foote:

The consequences of the battle are well known--the retreat of Cornwallis, and the delivery of Carolina.

Sketches of North Carolina (1846),
p. 279.

Douglas S. Freeman:

He called the battle for Greene "a tactical defeat that became a strategical victory."

George Washington: A Biography,
(New York, 1954), 6, 320.

Charles James Fox (The opposition leader in Parliament commented when the news of Guilford reached London):

Another such victory would ruin the British Army.

Quoted in Rankin, The American Revolution, p. 291.

Francis Vinton Greene:

As for the final result, all the advantages were on Greene's side. He lost the battle but gained the campaign.

General Greene, p. 225.

Nathanael Greene:

1. The battle was long, obstinate and bloody. We were obliged to give up the ground, and lost our artillery; but the enemy have been so soundly beaten, that they dare not move toward us since the action....I have never felt an easy moment since the enemy crossed the Catawba until since the defeat of the 15th but now I am

perfectly easy, being persuaded it is out of the enemy's power to do us any great injury. Indeed, I think they will retire as soon as they can get off their wounded.

In a letter of March 18, 1781, to Joseph Reed quoted in G. W. Greene's Life of Nathanael Greene, 3, 207; also in Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants (New York, N.Y., 1967 [reissue of 1958 edition]), p. 1164.

2. ...the enemy gained his cause, but is ruined by the success of it.

Quoted in Carrington, Battles of the Revolution, p. 564.

Thomas Jefferson:

I am to acknowledge the Receipt of your favors of the 16th and 23rd instant and to congratulate you on the Effects of the Action of the 15th in which though the field could not be retained yet you have crippled your adversary in such a manner as to oblige him ultimately to retire which best shows which party was worsted.

In a letter to Nathanael Greene, March 30, 1781, in Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 291.

Henry Lee:

1. On no occasion, in any part of the world, was British valor more heroically displayed. The officers of every grade did their duty; and each corps surpassed its past, through arduous exertions, in this terrible conflict. But the advantage of the ground, the weight of numbers, the skill of the general, and the determined courage of such portions of the American army as fought, presented obstacles not to be surmounted by inferior force. So maimed was the British army, that notwithstanding the flight of the North Carolina militia, had the second regiment of Maryland acted like the first, little doubt can exist but that Cornwallis must have shared the fate on this day which he experienced afterward. Afflicting were the sensations of the British general, when he looked into his own situation after the battle. Nearly a third of his force slaughtered; many of his best officers killed or wounded; and that victory for which he had so long

toiled, and at length gained, bringing in its train not one solitary benefit. No body of loyalists crowding around his standards; no friendly convoys pouring in supplies; his wants pressing, and his resources distant.

Memoirs of the War, p. 286.

2. The name of victory was the sole enjoyment of the conqueror, the substance belonged to the vanquished. Truly did the eloquent Fox exclaim in the British House of Commons, "Another such victory would destroy sic the British Army."

Memoirs of the War, p. 286.

3. In this battle, the victory of the British general was complete, but to himself disastrous; his glory was great, but his loss prodigious. Nearly one third of his troops were killed or wounded, while the loss of the Americans did not exceed one twelfth--facts which, as soon as they were ascertained, gave predominance to the republicans in North Carolina, and made Greene a conqueror, and Cornwallis a fugitive.

Campaigns of 1781, pp. 177-78.

"Leonidas" to Cornwallis:

You were heard to acknowledge at Cross Creek, that the Virginia militia were nearly equal to regulars, and that if the North Carolinians had made the same opposition, your army must have been inevitably ruined. Your old veterans were several times staggered, victory for some minutes appeared doubtful, and so very much cut to pieces were they when they got up to the Continental troops, that had it not been for an unlucky circumstance which occasioned a part of the Maryland line to give way, we should have balanced the battle of Camden and your lordship would no longer have been thought the Hannibal of the British army.

A letter from a South Carolina writer ("Leonidas") constituting an address to Cornwallis quoted (from the Pennsylvania Packet of September 20, 1781) in Frank Moore, Diary of the American Revolution from Newspapers and Original Documents (New York, 1860), pp. 471-72.

Charles Magill, aide-de-camp to General Huger:

Never was ground contested for with greater obstinacy, and never were troops drawn off in better order. Such another dear bought day must effectually ruin the British Army.

In a letter of March 16, 1781, to Thomas Jefferson, in Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 5, 162-63.

John Marshall:

The possession of the field yielded no positive good; and he derived from the victory no other advantage, than safety to the remnant of his army.

The Life of Washington, 4, 380.

John C. Miller:

The British carried the field, but their losses were staggering. Like Bunker Hill, this action, said a British officer, was "that sort of a victory which ruins an army." And Greene remarked that he was ready to sell Cornwallis another field at the same price. About one third of the British forces engaged at Guilford Courthouse were killed or wounded. Exhausted by the battle and burdened with wounded, the British were unable to exploit their victory.

Triumph of Freedom, 1775-1783 (Boston, 1948), p. 550.

Hugh F. Rankin and George F. Scheer:

Although he [Cornwallis] had fought valorously and well against a very superior force, his proportionate loss, particularly at the officer level, was so great he was paralyzed.

Rebels and Redcoats, p. 450.

David Schenck:

The fatal wound to royal authority, from which it lingered, and lingering died, on the 19th day of October 1781, was given at Guilford Court-House on this 15th day of March 1781.

North Carolina, 1780-81, p. 376.

C. Alphonso Smith:

(Written in competition for the Greene Monument at Guilford and approved as written by the United States Fine Arts Commission with but the deletion of Smith's second sentence: "It transferred the American Army into pursuers, the British Army into fugitives." The reason for the deletion was that this might be inimical to then (c. 1912) British-American relations. Smith, then of the University of Virginia, was a native of Greensboro. His was one of about 30 textual entries)

In the maneuvering that preceded it, in the strategy that compelled it, in the heroism that signalized it, and in the results that flowed from it, the Battle of Guilford Court House is second to no battle fought on American soil. Over the brave men who fell here their comrades marched to ultimate victory at Yorktown, and the cause of constitutional self-government to assured triumph at Philadelphia. To officer and private, to Continental soldier and volunteer militiaman, honor and award are alike due. They need neither defense nor eulogy but only just recognition. A grateful Nation erects this monument, therefore, as an expression of its pride in the men who fought here, of its imperishable devotion to their memory, and of its unalterable confidence in the permanence of the principles which their example vindicated and their blood consecrated.

Inscription on the Nathanael Greene Monument on the battlefield. See also Gray, "The Monuments at Guilford Courthouse NMP," pt. 2, pp. 35-44.

Charles Stedman:

In this battle the British troops obtained a victory most honorable and glorious to themselves, but in its consequences of no real advantage to the cause in which they were engaged....

History, perhaps, does not furnish an instance of a battle gained under all the disadvantages which the British troops, assisted by a regiment of Hessians and some yagers, had to contend against at Guilford Court-house. Nor is there, perhaps, on the records of history, an instance of a battle fought with more determinated perseverance than was shewn by the British troops on that memorable day. The battles of Crecy, of Poitiers, and of Agincourt, the glory of our own country, and the admiration of the ages, had in each of them, either from particular local situation, or other fortunate and favourable circumstances, something in a degree to counterbalance the disparity of numbers: Here time, place and numbers all united against the British.

The American War, 2, 382, 385.

Banastre Tarleton:

1. ...a victory, which, however splendid and honourable to the general and the troops, was not useful or advantageous to Great Britain.
2. The move, therefore, to Guilford, produced one of the most hazardous, as well as severe battles that occurred during the war.

Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 286, 284.

3. Tarleton also saw:

the victory as the pledge of ultimate defeat.

Quoted in Carrington, Battles of the Revolution, p. 564.

Theodore Thayer:

1. Cornwallis was crippled to the point where he could not chance another battle. Not until some hours after the battle when full returns were in did his Lordship realize how much his army had suffered at the hands of his foe....
2. Viewing the Revolutionary War in its broadest aspects, the Battle at Guilford Court House led directly to the final collapse of British power in America. Cornwallis had to leave North Carolina or be confined to the Wilmington area.

Perhaps he could have gotten to South Carolina to join Lord Rawdon at Camden, but he deemed it inadvisable to attempt it.

Nathanael Greene: Strategist of the American Revolution (New York, 1960), pp. 330-31.

George Otto Trevelyan:

Nathanael Greene, with much reason, now felt a touch of that self-satisfaction which in him was never an obtrusive quality. He had lost a battle, but he had gained the objective for which that battle had been fought; and in the conduct of a long, and most important and decisive, series of operations he had established on a firm base his reputation as a strategist. He had out-generalled the very best general whom King George had sent to America,—the best, indeed, that there was to send. He had relieved South Carolina from the presence of Lord Cornwallis and his army as effectually as if they had been destroyed in battle, or had laid down their arms under the terms of a capitulation; and with a lighter heart than he had known for many months past, he set forth on his journey back to the performance of what was still a difficult, though no longer an all but impossible, task.

The American Revolution, 2, George the Third and Charles Fox (London, 1914), p. 169.

Horace Walpole (the Whig leader in Parliament commented when the news of Guilford reached London):

Lord Cornwallis has conquered his troops out of shoes and provisions and himself out of troops.

Quoted in Rankin, The American Revolution, p. 291.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

This bibliography includes all items which have been specifically cited in the footnotes as well as other selected materials which were consulted and found useful. In a number of instances a work is both primary and secondary in nature because of its inclusion of contemporary material. When not listed under source material such items are asterisked. A case in point is James Graham's Life of Daniel Morgan which is basically biographical but contains a good deal of Morgan correspondence. This consequently is entered under "Biography" and asterisked.

An attempt has been made here to make the bibliography topical and, it is hoped, more useful. Its outline follows:

Primary Materials

Contemporary and Near Contemporary Histories
Memoirs, Papers, Correspondence, Participant Accounts
Reminiscences, Compilations, Anecdotes and Such
Official Records
Special Collections

Secondary Sources

General Histories of the Revolution
Monographic Materials
Biography

Biographical Registers

Particular Battlefield Studies, Reports, and Compilations

National Park Service

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ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATE 1. Nathanael Greene
(from the painting by Charles Willson
Peale, 1733)

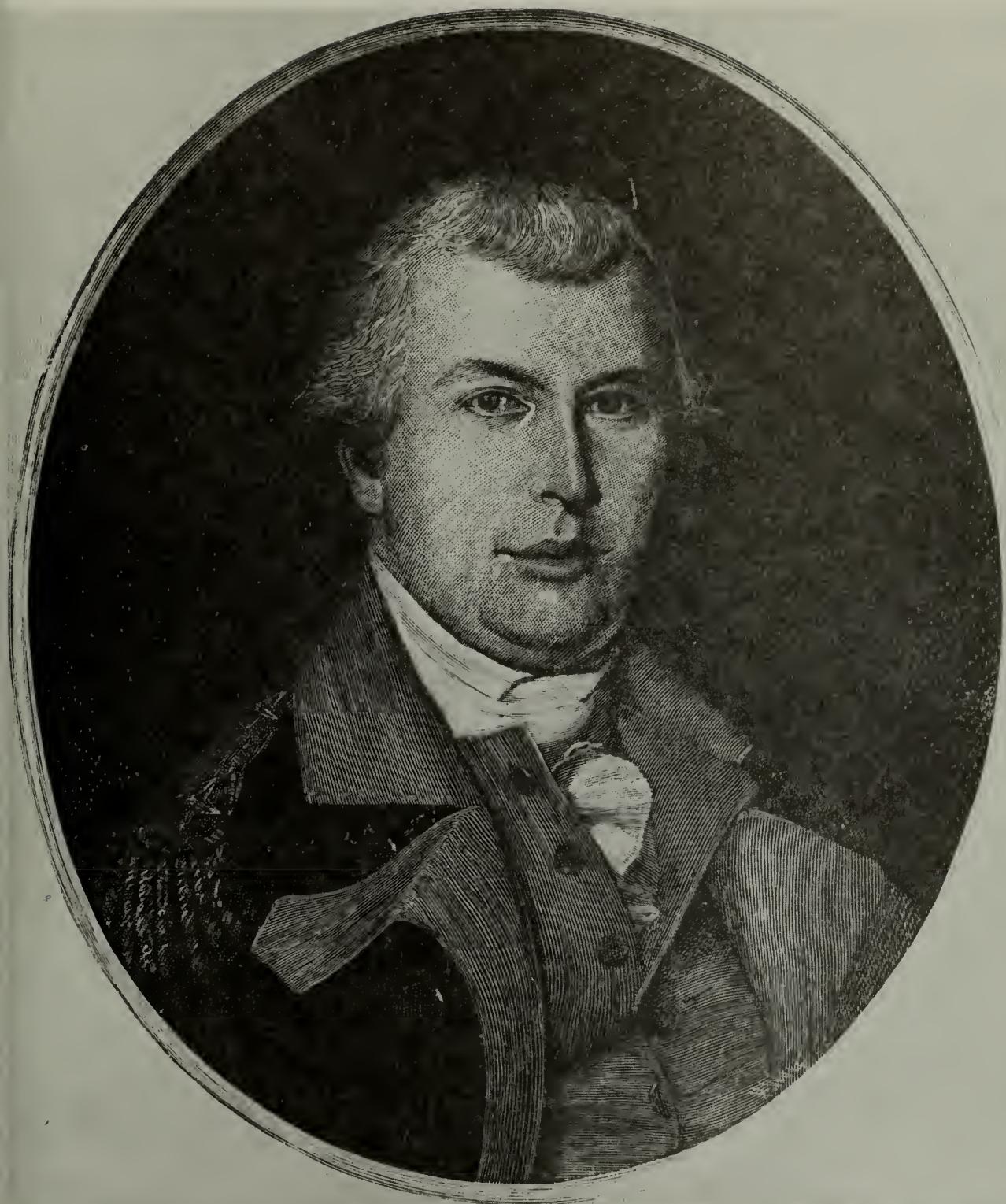
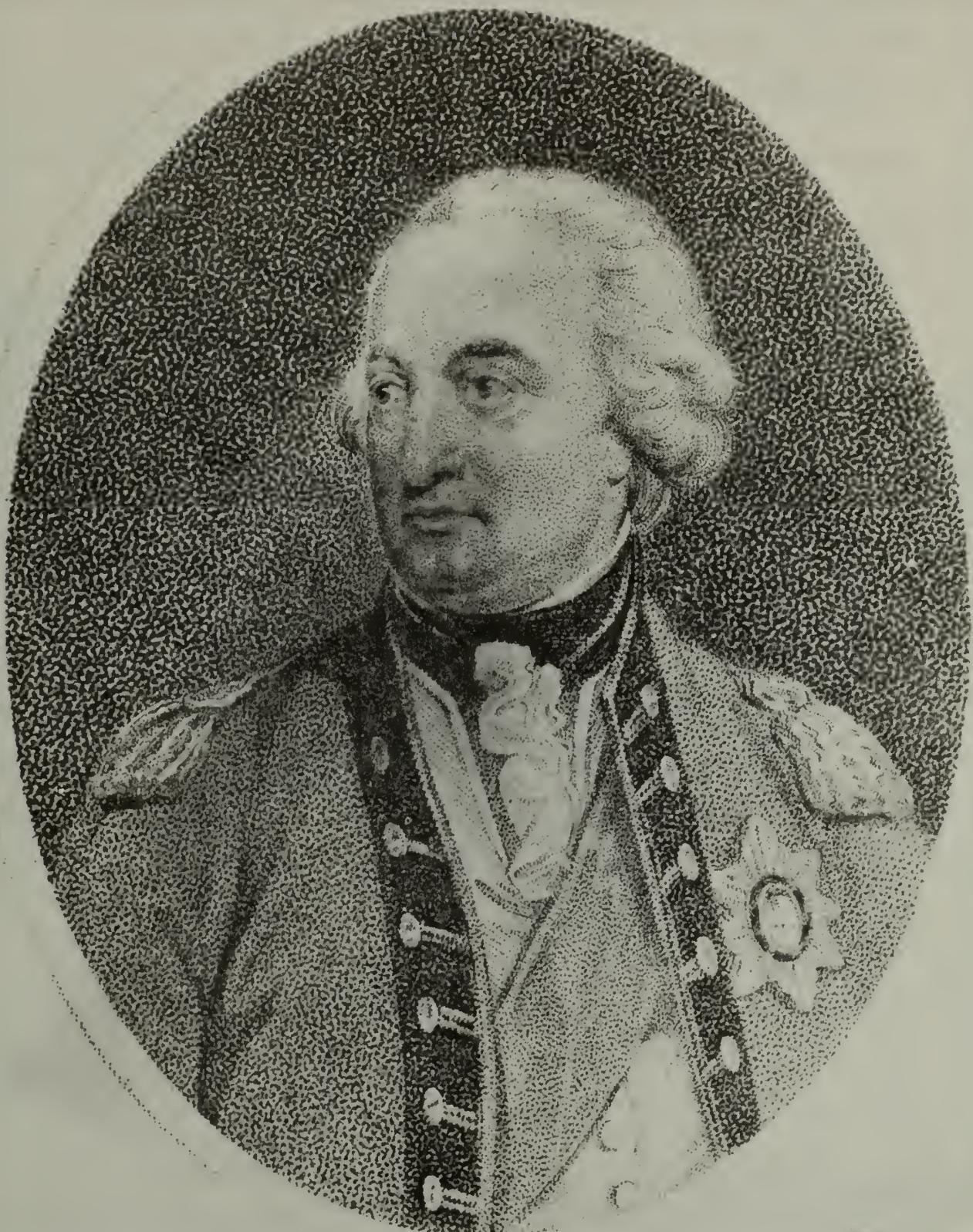


PLATE 2. "The Right Honble Charles Earl Cornwallis"
(an engraving dated London, June, 1781)
A photographic copy of this likeness was obtained
in 1950 by Superintendent Raleigh Taylor of
Guilford Courthouse NMP from a student then
doing a thesis on the Southern Campaign.



PLATE 2.

PLATE 3. Lord Cornwallis
(as engraved by J. Chapman)



PL 12 2

PLATE 4. Plan of the "Battle of Guildford"
(as engraved for Banastre Tarleton's
A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781
in the Southern Provinces of North America
[Dublin, Ireland, 1787], between pages 276-77).
This is essentially the same as the map in
the William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor,
Michigan. The latter does show a structure
immediately at the intersection of the Reedy
Fork and the New Garden roads (west of the one
and north of the other). In each instance the
north arrow needs to be rotated 50 degrees to
the left to lay it on the ground.

BATTLE OF GUILDFORD,

Fought on the 15th of March 1781.

One English Mile.

— British
— Americans

A. The Advance of Part of the Continentals
who broke the British Center, and
afterwards fell back to their original
position.

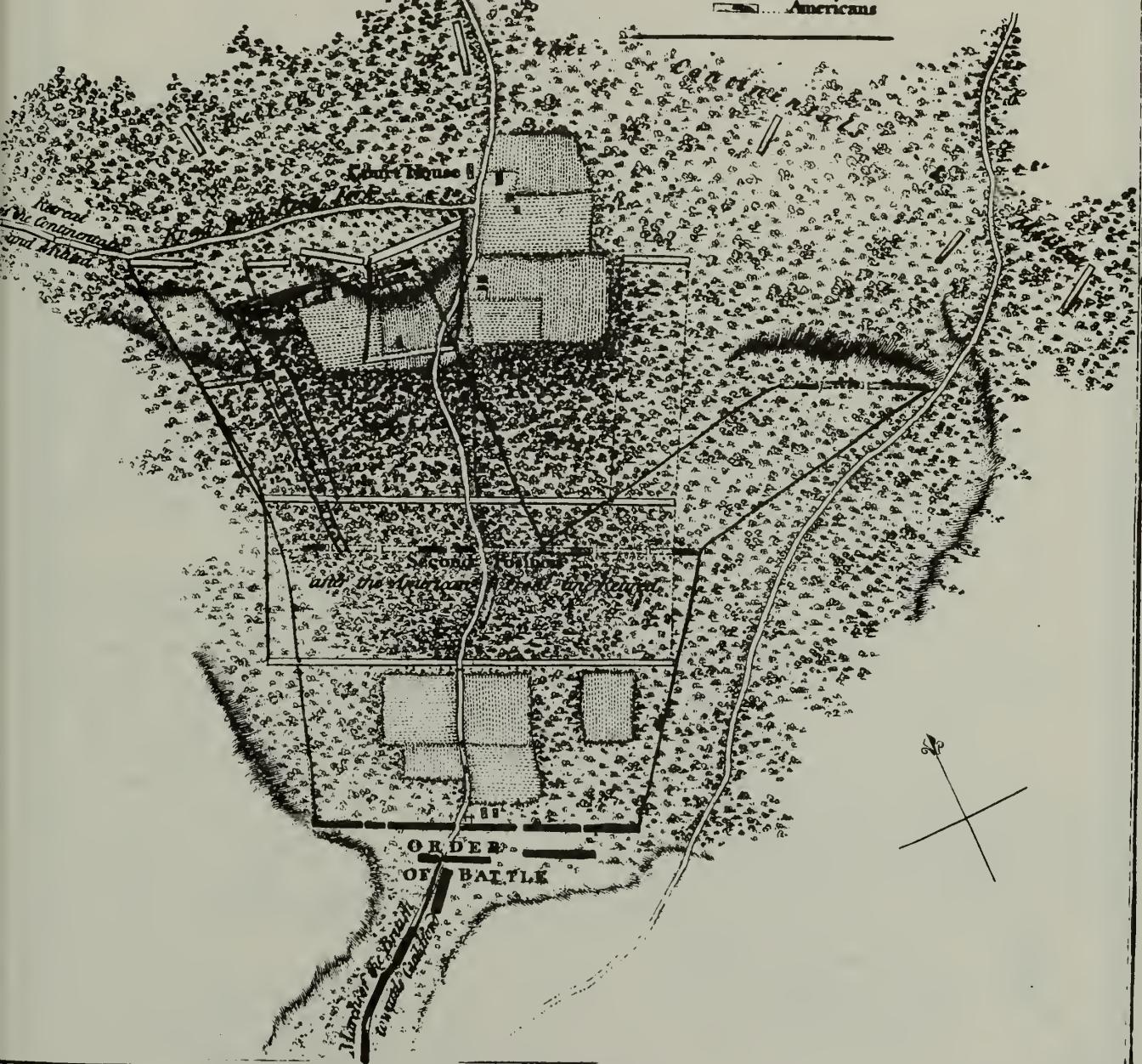
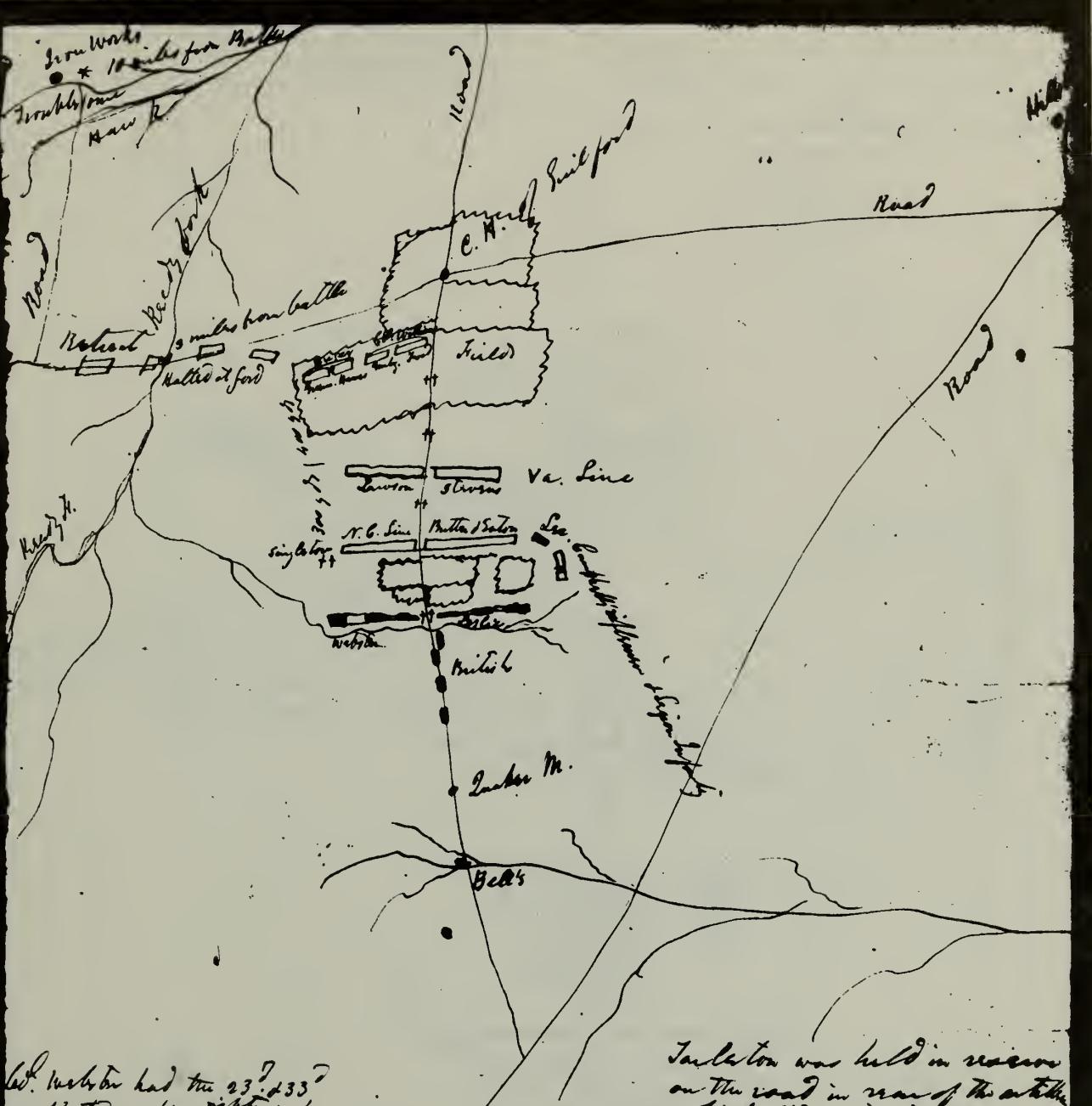


PLATE 5. **The Guilford Battlefield and Its Vicinity**
(from the Brown-Coalter-Tucker Papers [Box VII:2],
Earl Gregg Swem Library, The College of William and
Mary in Virginia). Though this diagrammatic, unscaled
map is undated, it appears to be contemporary in
nature. It was found among old papers in 1926 at
"Ivy Cliff" where Capt. Henry Brown was born about
1760. Brown is reported to have fought, and to have
been wounded, at Guilford.

It is a helpful overview, both in plan and legend,
though there are discrepancies as in the placement
of Singleton's cannon in the first American line. Note
that it diagrammatically places the "C.H. of Guilford"
in the road intersection and surrounds it with open
area. There are elements that suggest use of the
Tarleton plan, particularly the compass directional
arrow which has the same error of shift eastward.



Gen. Webster had the 23^d & 33^d
supported on his left by
Gen. O'Hara with the 2^d Battalion
of the Guards & the 2^d Battalion
of the Guards
The Guards & Light Infantry of the
Guards at first in the road
with McLeod's Artillery battery
subsequently supported by the 2^d
Guards.

Tarleton was held in reserve
on the road in rear of the attack
which did not quit the road
but moved on toward Hawke's
Gen. Leslie's command
71^d Regt. & Brock's Regt.
also 1^d Battalion of Guards
under Gen. Col. Houston

PLATE 6. Henry Lee's Plan of the Battle
(in Memoirs of the War in the Southern
Department [New York, 1870--a third edition
based on that of 1827], between pages 276-77).
This, essentially a redrawing of the Tarleton
plan, would suggest agreement with it.

BATTLE OF GUILDFORD

A. The Advance of Part of the
Continents, who broke the Bri-
tish Center, and afterwards fell
back to their original position.

Fought on the 15th of March 1781

Engraved for Lees Memoirs of the War.

One English Mile.

— British
— American

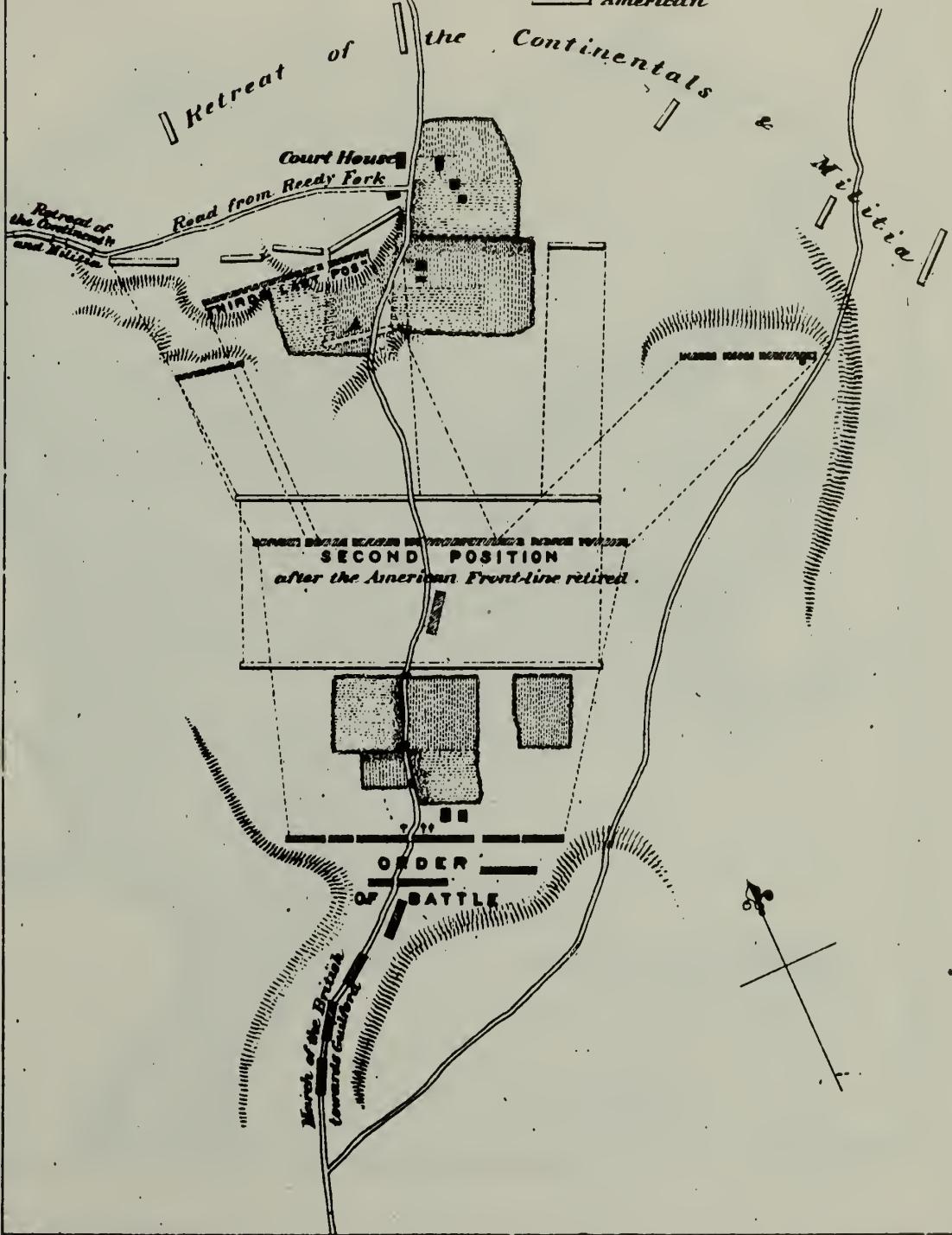


PLATE 7. A Plan of the Battle and Battlefield
(from Rev. E.W. Caruthers, Interesting Revolutionary Incidents: And Sketches of Character Chiefly in the "Old North State", Second Series [Philadelphia, 1856], bet. pp. 108-09).

Note the detailed battle movements, especially on the British far right, which developed into the separate action. Note, too, the added building symbols, especially in the courthouse area, and new road details.

A. The advance of part of the Continentals
who broke the British Order, and afterwards
will back to their original position.

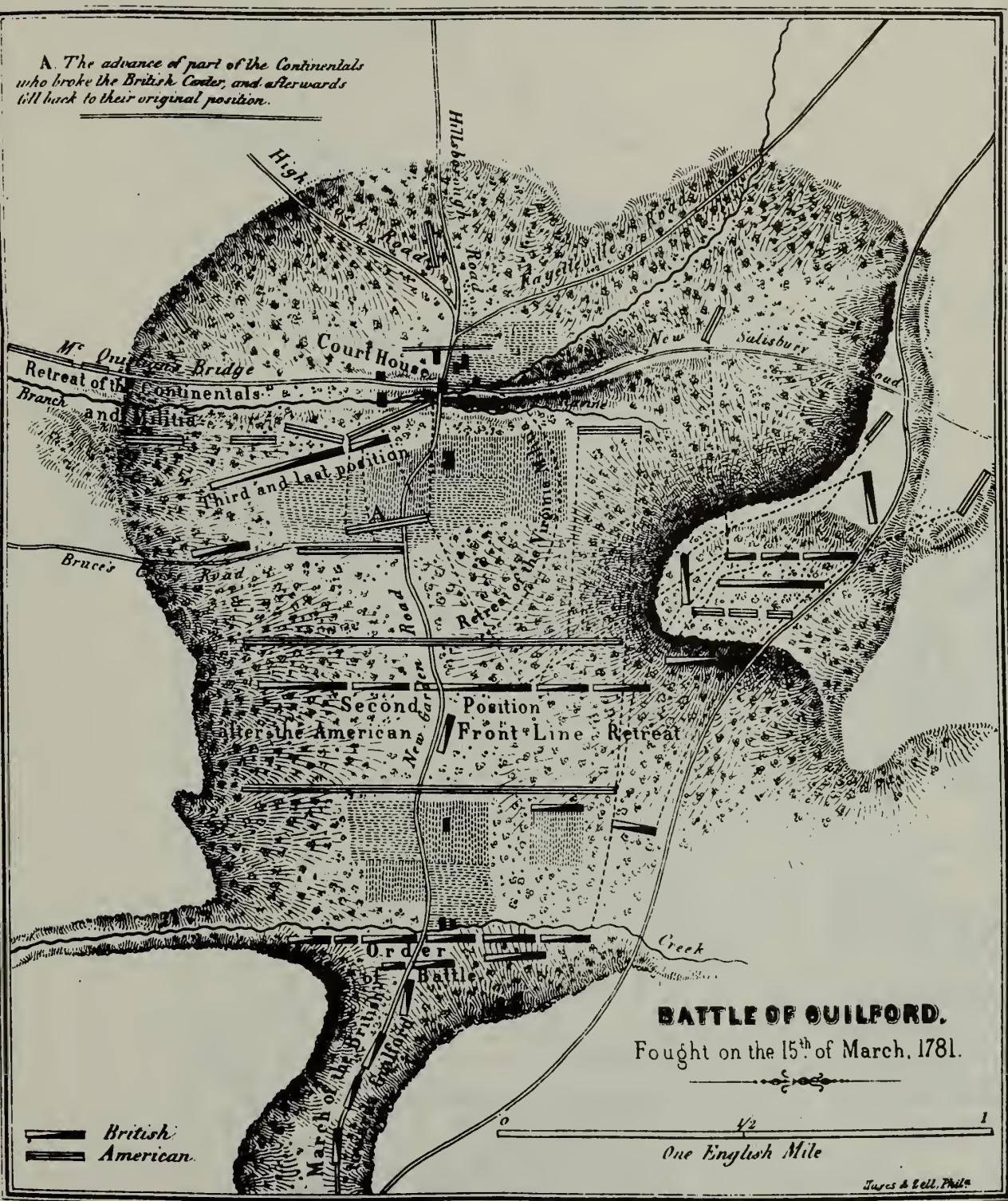


PLATE 8. The David Schenck Plan of the Battlefield and Action
(from his North Carolina, 1780-81: Being a History
of the Invasion of the Carolinas by the British Army
Under Lord Cornwallis [Raleigh, N.C., 1889], bet.
pp. 320-21).

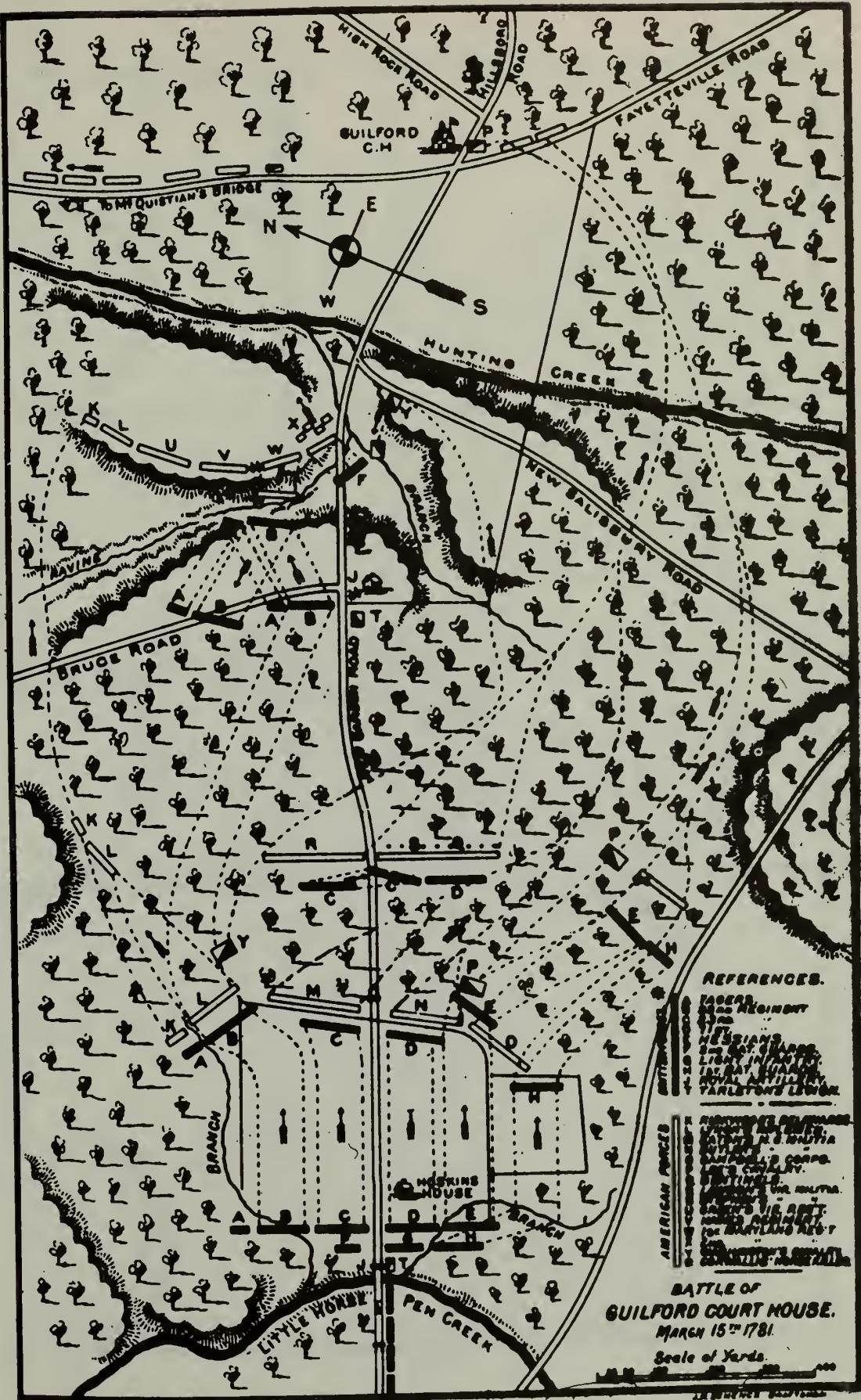
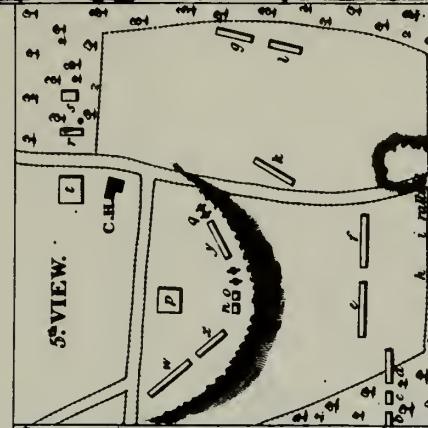
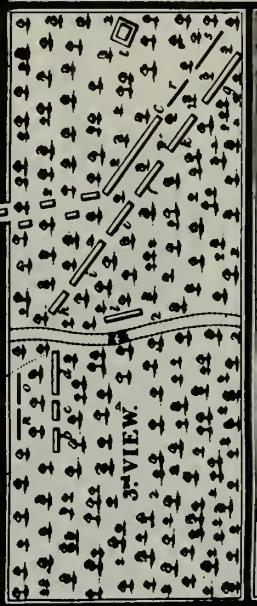
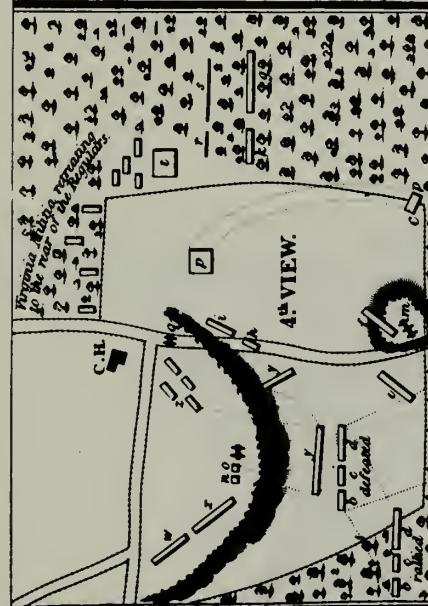
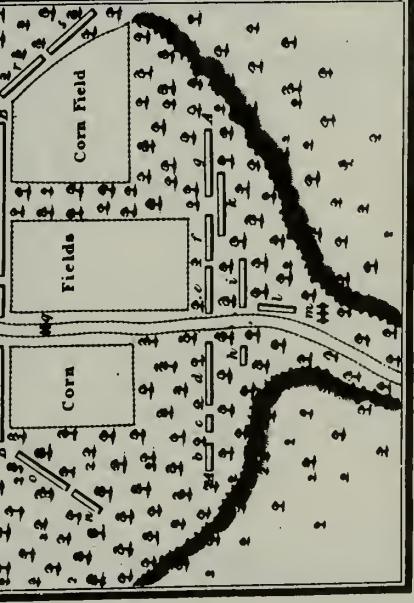
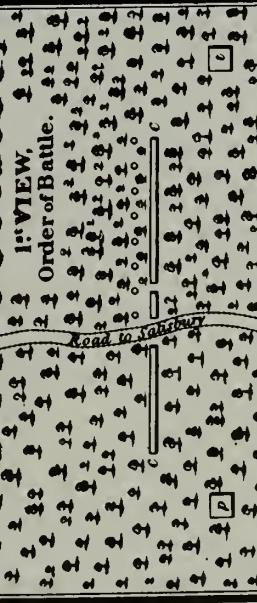
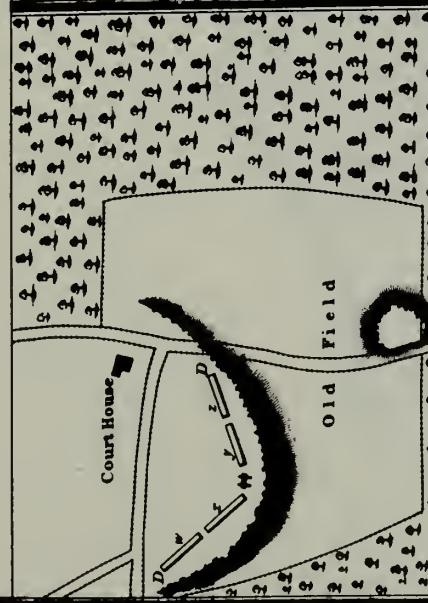


PLATE 9. The Battle in Five Stages
(from William Johnson's Sketches of the Life
and Correspondence of Nathanael Greene [Charleston, S.C.,
1822], 2, bet. pp. 4-5).

BATTLE of GUILFORD.

5 Views showing the successive changes of the Battle.



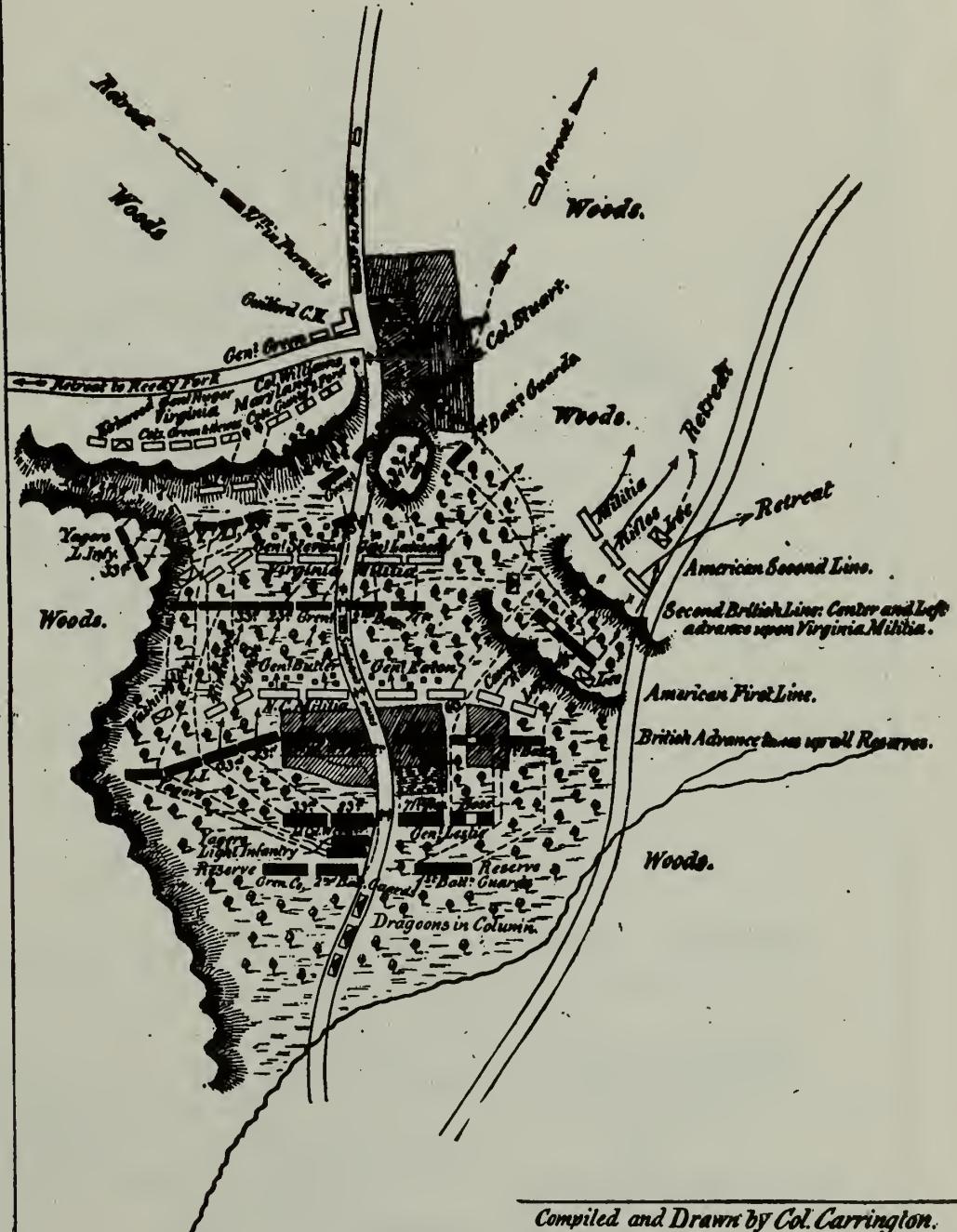
REFERENCES.

- A.A. British Line.
- B.B. North Carolina militia.
- C.C. Virginia militia.
- D.D. American. 3 Line or Reserve of Continentals.
- British Corps.
- b. Light Infantry of the Guards.
- c. Tugars.
- d. 33rd Regiment.
- e. 23rd D.
- f. 22nd D.
- g. Regiment of Rose.
- h. Grenadiers of the Guards.
- i. 2nd Batt. of the Guards.
- j. 1st D. D.
- k. Torkios Dragoons.
- m. British Artillery.
- n. Delaware.
- o. Lynch's Riflemen.
- p. Washington's cavalry.
- q. Campbell's Riflemen.
- s. Infantry of the Legion.
- t. Cavalry of D.
- w. Greats Regiment of Virginia Regulars.
- x. Bedford's D. under Howe.
- y. 1st Maryland D. Guards.
- z. 2nd D. D. Fort.

PLATE 10. Carrington's Battle Plan
(from Henry B. Carrington's Battle Maps and
Charts of the American Revolution [New York, c.
1881]).

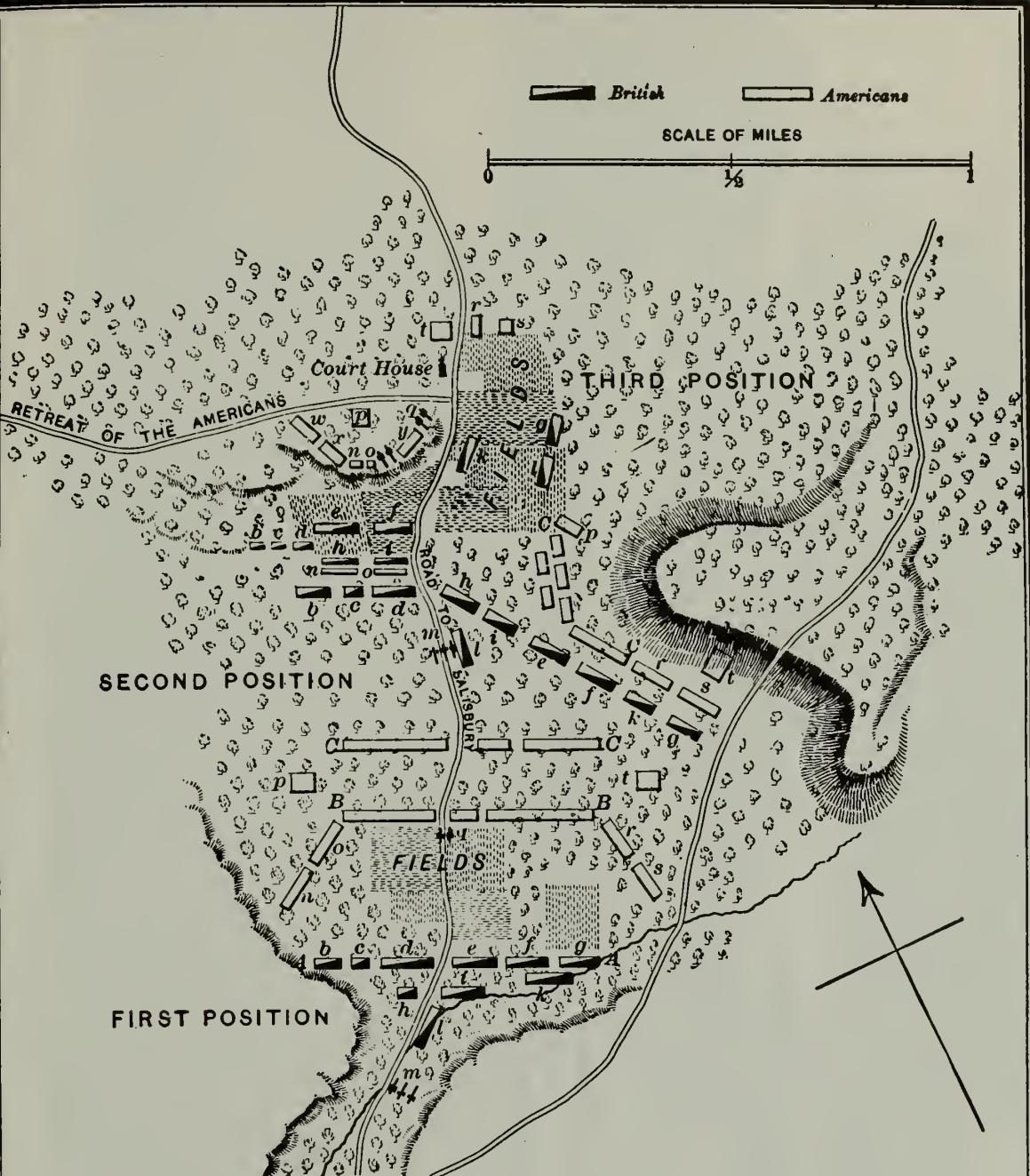
Baile
et
Guillot

*British.
Hussars.
Dragoons.
American.
Horse.*



Compiled and Drawn by Col. Carrington.

PLATE 11. The Francis Vinton Greene Interpretation of the Battle
(from his General Greene [New York, 1897], bet. pp. 226-27).



BATTLE OF GUILFORD COURT HOUSE.

Topography from Stedman's History of the American War. Position of Troops from Johnson's Life of Greene.

A. A. British Line.	g. Regiment of Boze.	r. Campbell's Riflemen.
B. B. North Carolina Militia.	h. Grenadiers of the Guards.	s. Infantry of the Legion.
C. C. Virginia Militia.	i. 2nd Bat. of the Guards.	t. Cavalry of the Legion.
D. D. American 3 Line or Reserve of Continentals.	k. 1st " "	w. Greene's Regiment of Virginia Regulars.
BRITISH CORPS.	l. Tarlton's Dragoons.	x. Buford's Regiment under Hawes.
b. Light Infantry of the Guards.	m. British Artillery.	y. 1st Maryland Reg't—Gunby.
c. Yagers.	AMERICAN CORPS.	z. 2nd Maryland Reg't—Ford.
d. 33rd Regiment.	n. Delawares.	
e. 23rd Regiment.	o. Lynch's Riflemen.	
f. 71st Regiment.	p. Washington's Cavalry.	
	q. American Artillery—Singleton	

PLATE 12. The Battlefield as Sketched in 1849 by Benson J. Lossing
(from his Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution [New York,
1859], 2, 405).

This looks toward the courthouse and village site from a distant vantage point — "the eminence southwest of the site of old Guilford Courthouse House, near the junction of the roads running one north to Bruce's Cross-roads, the other west to Salem."

VIEW OF THE BATTLE-GROUND.2

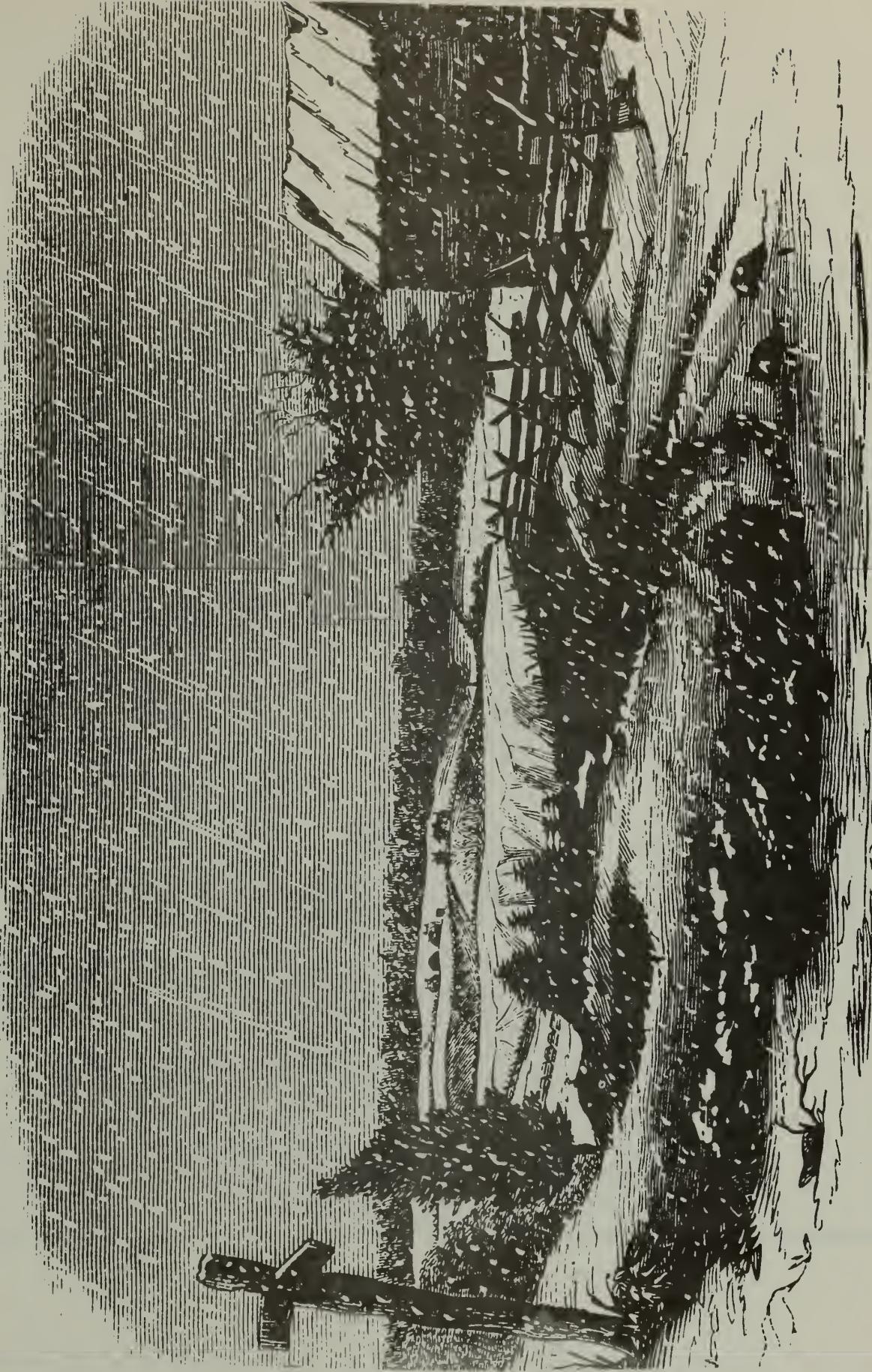


PLATE 13.

The "New Garden Meeting-house" as Sketched by Lossing in 1849
(from his Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution, 2, 407).

The opening skirmish of the Guilford battle ended here in the yard as the British infantry checked Henry Lee's push forcing him to withdraw.

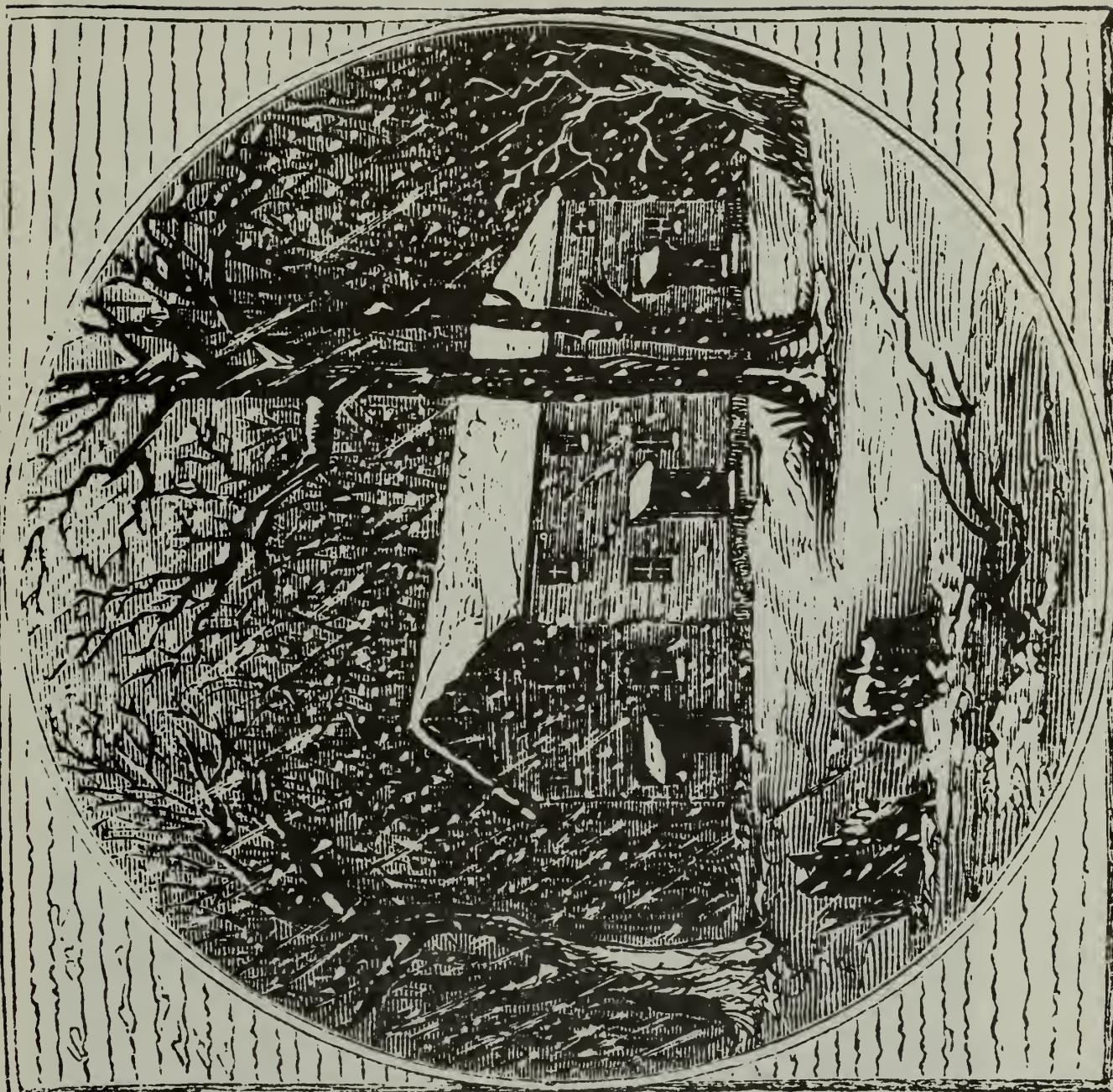


PLATE 14.

William Washington's Cavalry Charges into the British Guards
On the left is Peter Francisco with his huge sword drawn
(diorama in the Guilford Courthouse NMP Visitor Center Museum).



PLATE 15. Lee's Cavalry Skirmishing at the Battle of Guilford
Courthouse
(a book illustration, dated 1857, after a painting by
Alonzo Chappel)

Courtesy of the New-York Historical
Society, New York City



MAPS

LEGEND

PARK BOUNDARY

CULTIVATED OR OPEN FIELD ENCLOSURES
{ ALL OTHER WOODS }

BUILDINGS OR SUBJECTIVES

BRITISH ARMY

[NEW POSITION]

AMERICAN ARMY

[NEW POSITION]

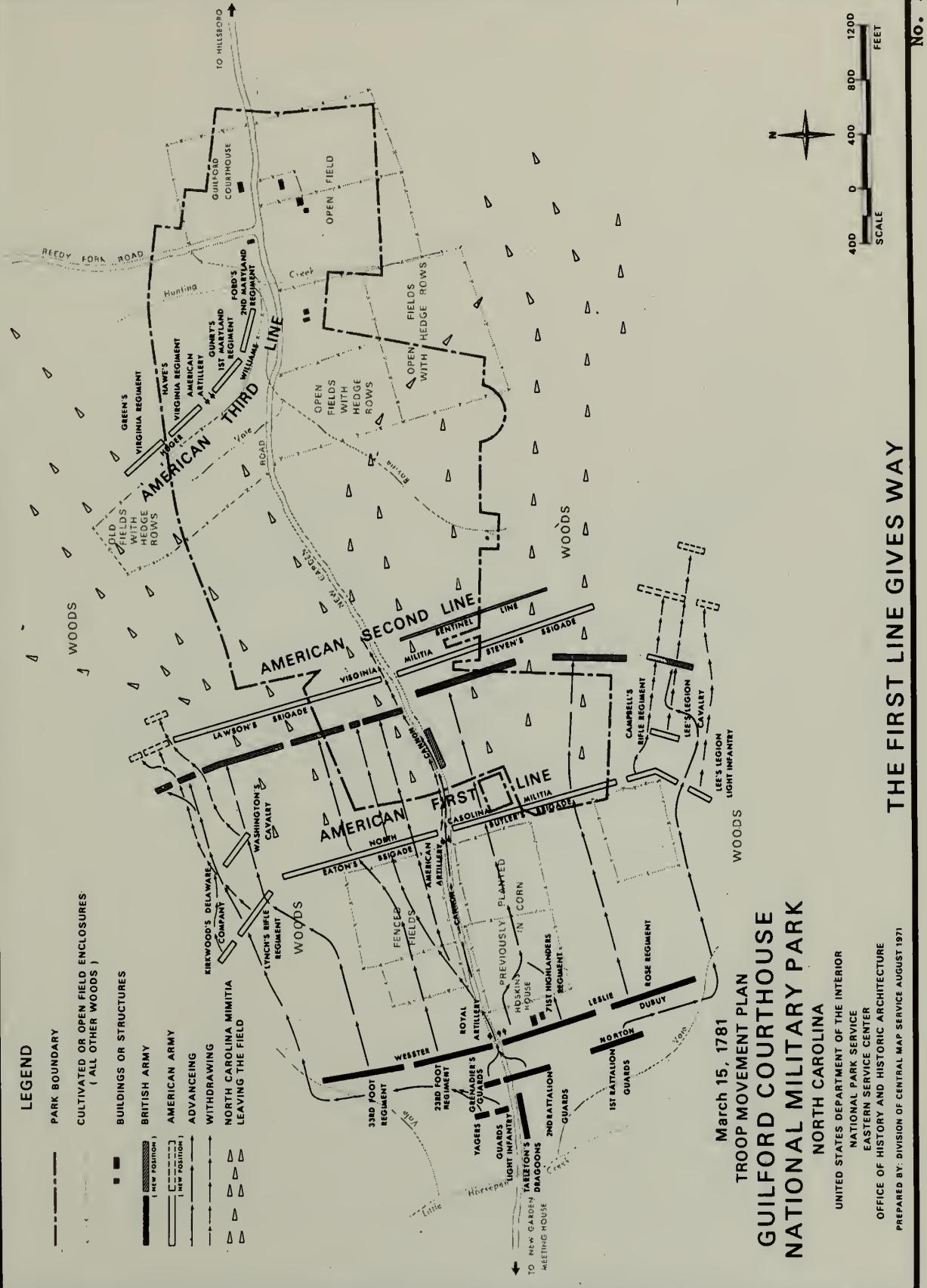
ADVANCING

WITHDRAWING

NORTH CAROLINA MIMMITIA

LEAVING THE FIELD

MURWOOD'S DELAY COMPANY

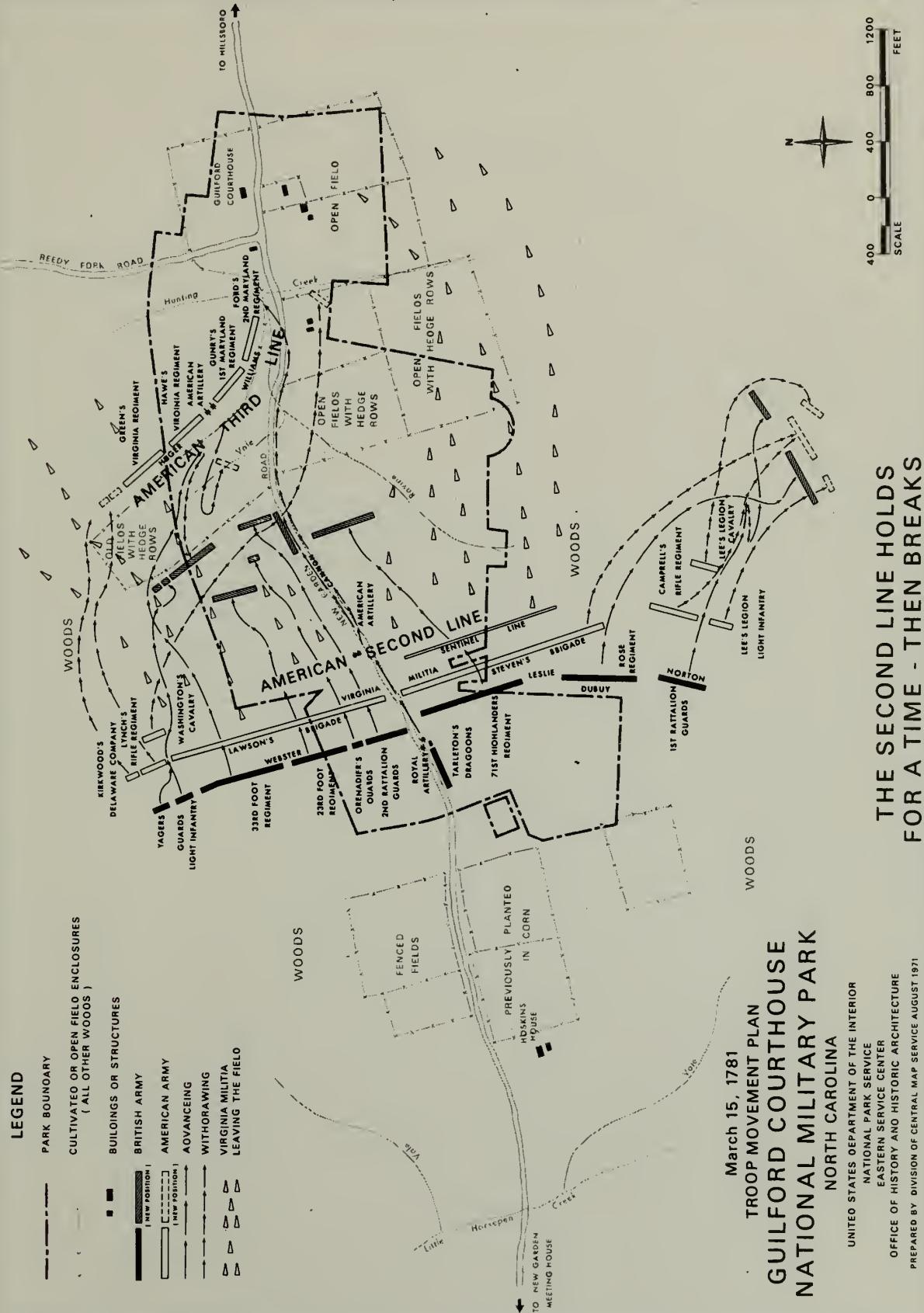


March 15, 1781
TROOP MOVEMENT PLAN
GUILFORD COURTHOUSE
NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
EASTERN SERVICE CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORY AND HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE
PREPARED BY: DIVISION OF CENTRAL MAP SERVICE AUGUST

LEGEND

- PARK BOUNDARY
- CULTIVATED OR OPEN FIELD ENCLOSURES
(ALL OTHER WOODS)
- BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES
- BRITISH ARMY
[NEW POSITION] AMERICAN ARMY
[NEW POSITION] ADVANCING
WITHDRAWING
LEAVING THE FIELD



No. 4



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